

OPINION & FEATURES



AJPress Photo by Andy Tecson

World's best

GOVERNMENT forces and their enemies stopped fighting and the streets of Metro Manila were again free of traffic as Filipinos savored every moment of the fight last May 2 between Manny Pacquiao and his British challenger Ricky Hatton. The brief fight, which saw Hatton being knocked down three times within two rounds, prompted Pacquiao's promoter Bob Arum to describe the Philippine boxing icon as "the greatest."

Pacquiao's victory brought jubilation across the country amid an economic slump and the scare over swine flu. Pacquiao's win is particularly sweet in a nation that has long despaired over the performance of its athletes in other sports. Last year the Philippine contingent in the Olympic Games in Beijing delivered one of the country's worst performances ever. With athletes even from war-torn Afghanistan doing better than the Filipinos and other Southeast Asian contingents reaping a harvest of Olympic medals, Filipinos wondered what had happened to the country's sports program.

Boxing has long been the sport where Filipinos can aspire for international recognition. The athletes who came closest to bagging the country's first gold in the Olympics, winning silver or bronze medals instead, were boxers. This indicates that in competitions where physical size is not an advantage or where the physical requirements ensure a level playing field, Filipinos can

excel, such as in gymnastics and certain water sports events. So why is the country reaping sports honors mainly in boxing?

Pacquiao, like other boxers before him, rose to the top chiefly on his own resources. Boxing champions earn sponsorships and government support only when they have already distinguished themselves in their sport and can afford the financial requirements of sustained, rigorous training.

Instead of dangling rich rewards to athletes who reap honors for the country, reward money and government resources can be poured into the development of world-class athletes. Sports training is difficult, time-consuming and costly. Athletes often have to juggle school work with the demands of sports training. The older ones have to earn a living even as they strive for national glory in their chosen sporting fields. Without the required resources, few Filipino athletes stand a chance of emerging, like Pacquiao, as the best in the world. (*Philstar.com*)

GUEST EDITORIAL

Bagumbayan, a new nation?

DICK Gordon has launched his Bagumbayan Movement. The name, obviously, is intended to communicate the kind of message and to stir the kind of voter involvement that the campaign of then US presidential candidate, Barack Obama, "Change you can believe in!", succeeded in eliciting from the electorate, many of them young.

It was at Bagumbayan, which was what the Luneta was originally called, that Dr. Jose Rizal was felled by musketry. With his writings, he had called for a change in the national character—in effect, a "pagbabang bayan" or "national change"—which is what the field in which he became a martyr was called.

Bagumbayan or Bagong Bayan means New Nation.

Abraham Lincoln made a similar reference in his immortal Gettysburg address: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Dick Gordon has been obsessed with this idea for years, long before Obama decided to run for president. The idea of a "new nation," a nation of involved citizens, volunteering to help the country get back on its feet, not caring about self but about the Motherland.

He had proven that volunteerism, creativity and a can-do spirit could more than make up for lack of resources. He and his volunteers took over an abandoned Subic Naval Base and converted it into an economic showcase. He did



STREET TALK

Greg B. Macabenta

the same thing with the Department of Tourism, when he took over its reins. With a promotions budget that seemed like a bad joke, beside that of Hongkong and Thailand, he mounted the Wow Philippines campaign and spurred a resurgence in tourism activities.

I recall, during the 2nd Global Filipino Networking Convention held at the PICC in 2003, which was sponsored by the Department of Tourism, Gordon brought a group of US-based Filipino convention delegates to Intramuros to show off his new Bagumbayan historical exhibit.

I was with the group, along with Loida Nicolas-Lewis. As Gordon led us through what seemed to be a life size diorama of Philippine history, going back to pre-Hispanic times, he gave a running commentary on how the Filipino people had suffered centuries of exploitation and injustice and how their suppressed anger finally exploded in the revolution of 1896.

As I listened to the commentary and as I stared at the life-like figures of Filipinos being oppressed by colonial masters and finally tearing their cedulas, as if to say, "Tama na! Sobra na!"—I found tears welling in my eyes.

All that sacrifice, all that blood, all those lives given up for the cause of a Bagong Bayan, and there we were, in the year 2003, still bedeviled by the same social cancer that Rizal had bewailed. And here we are today, in 2009, worse off than in 2003, under a government that seems intent on setting new records for bending the law,

Indeed, at the same time that Gordon has launched his quest for a new nation—a Bagumbayan—the Filipino people are being given even more reason to let their fury explode.

How else should a self-respecting citizenry react to the in-your-face brazenness of the Arroyo henchmen, including those in robes? They must really hold the Filipino people in contempt.

With so many high-ranking public officials accused of an assortment of crimes and none being indicted, Rodolfo "Jun" Lozada, the whistle-blower in the ZTE broadband scandal, has been ordered arrested and thrown in jail ostensibly for perjury.

Joc-Joc Bolante, Garci, Benjamin Abalos, Jovito Palparan, Romulo Neri, Mercedes Gutierrez—all kinds of noises, particularly in the Legislature, have been made about and against them for official abuses. But all these noises have been, to quote Shakespeare in Macbeth, a lot of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Nobody has been indicted. And it is not likely that anyone will ever be.

But Lozada, after daring to expose some of the highest-ranking officials in the Arroyo government for bribery and overpricing, has been indicted and has been ordered arrested.

It is pure, unadulterated harassment. The accuser, Mike Defensor, has never been shy

about being a hatchet man for Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, but one would have expected the judges to be more subtle, not out-and-out partisan, more concerned about *delicadeza*, not *garapal*.

As it is, you can almost hear Defensor and his cohorts snort: "May angal? May reklamo? Any complaints? Up yours!"

Their next moves are predictable. They'll time the arrest of Lozada towards the weekend so that he will be guaranteed to spend a few days in jail, even if there will be an attempt to post bail.

Who knows? Maybe, once in jail, he will accidentally be run over by a truck. Or get caught in the midst of a prison melee and conveniently killed. Or, at the very least, given a taste of the third degree, with no traces of physical violence on the exposed parts of the body. But enough to make him wish he had just stayed overseas and taken the option of the three monkeys: Hear nothing, see nothing, speak nothing.

At this point, it seems utterly futile to demand to know where justice is. It's like shouting in the midst of a howling storm. No one will listen.

Besides, who's going to complain? The cowardly Filipino people?

What will it take for the Filipino people to overcome their apathy or fear? What will it take for them to boil with rage, to scream, "Tama na, sobra na!"? the way they did after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino? What will spur them to rally to clench their muscles and finally let their outrage explode?

And how about Dick Gordon and his Bagumbayan Movement? Will it be just another slogan-shouting, wishy-washy group or will they be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice the way Rizal did at Bagumbayan? (*gregmacabenta@hotmail.com*)

Mother's Day

by VICKY P. GARCHITORENA

SOME say it smacks of commercialism. A way to rev up sales for gifts, for special dinners out at high-end restaurants, for bouquets of lovely flowers in spring.

Others are happy that one special day is set aside every year to honor the one person who means the most to almost all of us. A way to express our gratitude for all the years, weeks, days, and hours that mothers lavish on their children.

Nothing in the world—not a diamond necklace, not a handwritten letter lovingly composed, not a vacation from household chores—can adequately express our appreciation for the lives of dedication of mothers everywhere.

They kissed away the pain of childhood scratches; cheered us on when we tried our hand

at sports or drama, or various contests; empathized with our broken hearts; gave us advice and recipes when we in turn became mothers.

Whether our mother is quiet, boisterous, funny, overbearing, aloof or in our face, we love her because we know that whatever she does—even if it irritates us—is done from the depth of her love for us.

How then can we really show her how much we love her?

Today, there is a growing trend of giving gifts that make a difference in the lives of others. Many birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries, and corporate

events are now used as occasions to raise funds for a cause that resonates with the celebrants.

The program GILAS (for Gearing up Internet Literacy and Access for Students) seems to have attracted its fair share of donations in this genre. GILAS is a very strategic nationwide program being implemented by a multisectoral social consortium in the Philippines. It aims to put a computer laboratory with internet access in all 6,300 or so public high schools in the country. Already, more than 2,100 schools have connected, giving more than one million underprivileged kids access to

the information available on the world wide web.

When Raymond Mendez heard about it, he immediately emailed AF USA, saying he had been looking for ten years for a way to honor his mother, who was a public school teacher in Cavite. The trouble was, he didn't know exactly where she had taught, as she had passed away some years ago.

There were six such schools in Cavite and it seemed an impossible task to find out which one was his mother's school. Fortunately, he told us that his mother had studied there in many years back and we found out that at that time, there was only one public high school there. Today, the Emiliano Tirona National High School in Cavite has a computer lab with internet access named after his mother

Marilyn Abalos, a second generation Fil-Am, saw in GILAS a way of honoring her mother, now 94 years old. A retired Ci-

tibanker based in New York, Marilyn decided to identify a public high school in her mother's hometown—Oton, Iloilo—and to undertake a campaign to raise the \$6,500 needed to put ten PCs, a Local Area Network, and internet access in the school.

She did it by sending an email to all her relatives and friends with a photo of her mother asking them to join her in this wonderful way of giving back—to her Mom, to her *kabayans*, and to her country. In about six months, she had reached her goal. Today, Marilyn has decided to also get more involved in the school, keeping in touch with the teachers and mentoring a number of students.

She has also decided to sponsor a second school, still in Oton.

She is a perfect model for those who may ask themselves "What can one person do to change the lives of our brothers and sisters in the home country?" Marilyn

identified her goal and rallied her natural circles—first her family members (Even her nephew asked his aunts and uncles to donate to GILAS instead of giving him graduation gifts), and then her circles of friends and former colleagues in Citibank.

She is that One Voice. She has spoken up in the name of the kids in Oton, who, with their computer and internet literacy skills, will be better prepared for the workforce because one person cared. And inspired others to do the same.

Do you want to honor your mother? Find out what city or province she is from. Then email us (*garchitorena.vp@ayala.com.ph*) or give us a call (650) 598-3126. We will help you give her a Mother's Day gift that will live in the hearts and minds of at least 500 Filipino youth.

Happy Mother's Day!

Vicky Garchitorena is the President of Ayala Foundation-USA.



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