

OPINION & FEATURES



Mother-unfriendly

PHILIPPINE society is supposed to be matriarchal and the country, for the second time, is led by a woman. Yet the Philippines fared badly in an annual international survey on the state of mothers.

Now in its 10th year, the State of the World's Mothers 2009 Report ranked the Philippines 42nd among 75 less developed countries, four notches lower than its rank last year. The report, prepared by the US-based Save the Children Inc., classified 154 countries into three development tiers, with the Philippines falling into the middle tier together with most other Asian nations. In this tier the Philippines ranked behind Thailand, which placed 11th, China (14th), Vietnam (23rd), Mongolia (29th) and Malaysia (36th).

The Mothers' Index was based on women's health, educational, economic and political status as well as children's well-being. In the first tier of "more developed" countries, Sweden, Norway and Australia were ranked as the most mother-friendly countries in the world. In Tier 2, which included the Philippines, the best places were Cuba, Israel and Argentina. The Maldives, Cape Verde and Uganda topped

the list in the last tier.

Sen. Pia Cayetano, who chairs the Senate committee on social justice, said the country would be unable to meet the Millennium Development Goals particularly in the reduction of maternal mortality and deaths of children under five years old. She said an average of 10 to 11 mothers die daily in the country from childbirth complications.

The country's ranking in the Mothers' Index was weighed down by the fact that in 2007, skilled health personnel were present at only 60 percent of childbirths. In the same year, 28 out of every 1,000 Filipino children did not live until their fifth birthday, 28 percent of children under five were moderately or severely underweight, and only 33 percent of women used contraceptives. Those were sobering figures as Filipinos paid tribute to their mothers on their special day last Sunday. (*Philstar.com*)

Run-off in 2010 presidential election proposed

EARLIER I wrote that if Manny Pacquiao wanted to run for governor or representative of Sarangani Province, that would seem all right inasmuch as he has a fervent desire to serve his countrymen. I spoke too soon. Like my media colleagues and the thinking public, I was appalled by the irresponsible way the champ disregarded the Department of Health's exhortation for him to wait a few more days in Los Angeles, which has been placed on the watch list for swine flu. The incubation period for the flu virus takes a full week. I can understand his argument that it was tougher to wait in LA, but what's unforgivable was the way he greeted the welcoming crowds at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), led by his children, with hugs and kisses and then motoring with his party to the packed Quiapo church, the Mall of Asia and a hotel afterwards—when the most sensible thing to do was to leave the airport quickly and stay at home.

It seems Pacquiao's head has swelled with all the adulation, especially his inclusion among the 100 most influential people by *Time magazine*. But the bigger blame lies with his advisers, led by Environment Secretary Lito Atienza. Instead of prodding him to be the true champion of the people's welfare by minding their health, his advisers told him to ignore the admonition of

the DOH and the World Health Organization and defy the Palace and insist that he's very healthy. Pacquiao flunked this public service test, while Atienza et al. failed to project true wisdom.

With the Comelec's deadline for registration of national candidates set for November, the political tempest has begun to boil and political analysts like Tony Gatmaitan have already counted 14 candidates for the presidency. Among them, I note Noli de Castro, Manny Villar, Joseph Estrada, Mar Roxas, Richard Gordon, Chiz Escudero, Loren Legarda, Gilbert Teodoro, Bayani Fernando and it seems, judging from his expensive ads, Pagcor's Ephraim Genuino. There are speculations that even Manny Pangilinan is running, though he has denied this. Some people think Go Negosyo's Joey Conception is testing the water. Ang Kapatiran Party has launched a search for relatively unknown local politicians with proven track records, who could be projected for national roles. One of them is Mayor Rustico Balderian of Tabon-Tabon, Leyte, a successful US-based doctor who returned to his hometown, only to realize how sorely lacking it is in facilities to educate his poorer townmates. With his own money, Balderian put up a nursing school which became so successful

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

(95 percent passing rate in the board) that students from bigger towns and cities began flocking there. Then he put up a hospital for the school, and later a computer school. Soon he realized that in order to transform his town more effectively he should run for mayor.

Interestingly, there seems to be as many political movements being launched as there are candidates. Among them are Gordon's Bagumbayan, Ako Mismo which is suspected to be the support base of MVP, and recently the ChangePolitics Movement dominated by anti-administration people, which aims to reduce vote-buying but which I can foresee eventually pushing for an opposition candidate.

Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) party was recently quoted as opining that the 2010 race will be a *labanan ng mga mahihina* (battle of the weak) where the candidate with the political machinery wins. No doubt it will be a battle of coalitions and alliances, and here the touted merger

of Lakas and Kampi, both under the President's wings, is thought to have the advantage over groups seeking resuscitation such as the Nacionalista Party, Liberal Party and Nationalist People's Coalition. But though presidential political adviser Gabby Claudio has been predicting the merger, when this will ever happen is anyone's guess. Former President Joseph Estrada has threatened to run if the opposition doesn't unite behind one candidate, but no matter how many coalitions are formed, it's clear there will be five or six candidates running.

Having many candidates raises the possibility of a minority winner again, at a time when a new president needs a clear and strong mandate to institute badly needed reforms because of the global economic crisis. This has given rise to the idea of a run-off election, similar to the system in some European countries (such as France, where Nicolas Sarkozy won in 2007 in a run-off against socialist candidate Segolene Royal, after they got the two highest number of votes in a field of four candidates). Iloilo Rep. Raul Gonzalez Jr. recently filed HB 6183, titled *Run-Off Election for President*, on the argument that a minority-elected president is at a great disadvantage, because he has to forge alliances with

various political groups and is thus more susceptible to the influence of certain vested interests as he tries to solidify his hold on power and govern more effectively.

Gonzalez pointed out that all the post-EDSA presidents were minority presidents, with Fidel Ramos garnering only 23 percent of the votes in the 1992 elections and Joseph Estrada, the most popular post-EDSA candidate to run in a regular election, bagging only 40 percent. By contrast, asserts Gonzalez, all except one of our pre-EDSA presidents were elected by a majority vote. The exception was President Carlos P. Garcia who won a mere 41 percent of the votes in 1957. The two presidents who had the biggest margins of victory were Ramon Magsaysay in 1953 who got 69 percent of the votes, and Manuel Quezon who bagged 68 percent in 1935. The clear majority won by our pre-EDSA presidents may be one reason why their terms were marked by relative political stability. The exception was that of Ferdinand Marcos who, while having garnered 55 percent of votes over President Diosdado Macapagal, ran into enormous turbulence because of his declaration of martial law and his refusal to give up power. (*Inquirer.net*)

Canceling each other out

Daly City has the most number of Filipinos in America as a percentage of population—over 30 percent. In spite of that, there has only been one Filipino-American elected to the city council all these years. Mike Guingona.

For many years, *Pinoy* candidates tried but failed to get elected, mainly because everytime someone from the community announced his intention to run for a council seat, somebody else would jump up and declare, "Why you? Why not me?" And would promptly throw his hat in the ring. Invariably, three or four candidates from the Fil-Am community would end up running against each other and fighting over the *Pinoy* vote. Invariably, they would lose.

Mike Guingona's victory was due to the fact that he decided to campaign outside of the Fil-Am community while wooing his voter base. He had actually participated in a pact with other *Pinoy* would-be councilmen who had agreed that only one of them would run. Mike lost the straw vote but decided to run anyway (shades of Fidel V. Ramos).

Daly City is not the only place in America where Filipinos have battled each other in a mad scramble for political office. It has become a joke among us that the way to prompt someone to run for an elected position is by announcing that you intend to do so.

Doesn't that remind you of the present scramble to become THE replacement of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo?

Everyone seems to believe that Arroyo is so vulnerable, he or she is convinced that toppling

her anointed candidate in 2010 is equivalent to a slam dunk. That, of course, is a sure way for the administration candidate—assuming it is not Arroyo herself—to win.

Didn't anybody suspect something fishy when Malacanang's mouthpieces began making noises about supporting Gov. Ed Panlilio for president, when the latter's camp began to send out feelers concerning his presidential ambitions?

Right now, with Ping Lacson, Mar Roxas, Manny Villar, Dick Gordon, Francis Escudero, Loren Legarda, Brother Eddie Villanueva, Among Ed Panlilio, possibly Mike Velarde and heaven knows who else, gearing up to run against the administration candidate—and, in the process, slashing at each other—the Arroyo candidate doesn't have to do much sniping and scuttling. The Saviors of the Country are doing that to each other.

Each of the declared or implied "presidential" claims to be imbued with qualities deserving of the presidency. Some of them are, in fact, qualified for the highest position in the land. Others simply need to read up on the Peter Principle.

Of course, the United States is no different. In every presidential contest, several contenders always turn up—some of them never give up trying and others are just plain spoilers—but because the two party system prevails in the country, and a candidate from an independent party has no chance of winning, all the wannabes on both



STREET TALK

Greg B. Macabenta

sides of the political fence submit themselves to a primary where the final selection of the party standard bearer is made.

The only candidate who managed to give the impression of a fight was Ross Perot, several elections back. Ralph Nader was nothing but a spoiler and probably caused Al Gore to lose.

At any rate, when the smoke of the primary battle clears, the losing candidates are expected to rally behind the winner, the way Hillary Clinton campaigned for Barack Obama, after losing a close fight.

Back when the two party system was still the norm in our country, the Nacionalistas and the Liberals all ended up with standard bearers, although there were those who, not being happy with prospects in their original parties, decided to jump ship. That's how we ended up with Liberal Senator Ferdinand Marcos becoming the official candidate of the Nacionalistas.

These days, with so many political parties springing up and old ones being cosmetized with new, fancy names—mostly sounding like a battle slogan—one has to have tons of money to be able to rise above the din, enjoy sufficient top-of-mind-awareness and manage to get the required percentage of votes (well below the percentage that would be considered a mandate) in order to win.

Guess who has an advantage in such a con-

test? It doesn't take rocket science to know that the administration candidate enjoys a tremendous edge.

Proceeding on the premise that all of the would-be presidents have the good of the country at heart and granting that they are genuinely concerned over the dregs to which our hapless people have descended, is it possible for them to consider submitting to the equivalent of a presidential primary, where the strongest and most viable candidate of them all is selected and is supported by the rest?

For them not to agree to such a primary is exactly what Arroyo and her strategists want. That almost guarantees their victory.

They should recall the story of King Solomon who, upon being approached by two women, both claiming to be the mother of an infant, decided to test them by ordering the baby cut in two.

One woman readily agreed, preferring to see the baby killed than have the other claim it. The other woman, however, told Solomon that she would rather see the baby taken by her rival than see it die.

"Then you must be the real mother," said the king.

Now is the time for the heroes and the statesmen among the opposition candidates to declare that their concern for the country is greater than their own presidential ambitions. Whoever willingly does so may be the one most deserving to be president. (gregmacabenta@hotmail.com) ■



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