

OPINION & FEATURES

Nurturing our own

AMIDST the political turmoil and outrage caused by the now infamous constituent assembly, amid the chaos being caused by the onset of the presidential campaigns, representatives from various sectors in the Philippines converged in Boston, Massachusetts for the 2024 Gawad Kalinga Global Summit 2009. The summit ran from June 12 -14, working towards a single-minded and altruistic goal—"A World Without Poverty."

Prominent figures as Vice-President Noli de Castro, Philippine Daily Inquirer's Conrad de Quiros, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, GK Champion Tony Meloto and GK Builder Dylan Wilk took time from their hectic schedule to discuss possible solutions to fight the never-ending battle against poverty in the Philippines.

Even Cambridge Vice-Mayor Sam Snyder, in behalf of the City of Cambridge, gave his full support.

"The city of Cambridge supports the GK global summit to unveil the GK vision of 2024 of poverty eradication. What a noble goal that is, to discuss and think about it and chat strategies on how to do it. The two countries (Philippines and US) have a special relationship. There are 3 million Filipino-Americans residing in the United States, about 100 percent of them are gainfully employed. They participate in all facets of American life and strengthen the bond between our countries. I believe that sponsoring

this kind of activity livens our community and creates avenues for a better world," Snyder said.

"We launch GK as a global movement, to bring Filipinos out of poverty, slum after slum, town after town. Based on our experience, it is possible that we can get the Philippines out of Third World without having to depend on foreign aid, depend on too much funding, we have the land, resources and talent," were the words of GK Champion Tony Meloto, urging Fil-Ams to contribute to the effort.

"The difference between a rich and poor country is the citizens' love for the country. If we love our country, we will bring it out of the Third World even before 2024. We believe by 2010, we can do that because of our partners, our target now is to get land for 5 million families by 2024," he further said.

An impossible feat, it may seem, especially since Fil-Ams are going through tough times with the economic recession as well. If we



Vice President Noli de Castro is flanked by Emma Ruth Yulo, director of the Department of Tourism in New York, Gawad Kalinga founder Tony Meloto and Consul General Cecille Rebong of the Philippine Consulate in New York at the Philippine Independence Day Reception in Boston where GK paid tribute to the 700 patriots who gathered for the global summit. AJPress Photo by Momar G. Visaya

think about the miracle of the five loaves and two fish that fed a multitude in the Bible, we would probably come to an unlikely yet valid conclusion—more than the miracle itself, the resources possibly came from what little people had that they volunteered to share that day—an act that turned meagerness into a veritable feast. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL

The swine flu and heroism



STREET TALK
Greg B. Macabenta

I UNDERSTAND everyone is concerned over the swine flu pandemic in the Philippines. But that's nothing compared to the national illness being spread by the swine in the House of Representatives (yes, that's what the abbreviation Rep. before their names means.).

And we know who the swineherd is. She is Mistress of the Piggery by the Pasig where the trough is and where the pigs converge to gorge themselves.

With such disheartening news coming out of Manila, it was such a great relief to attend the first Gawad Kalinga Global Summit in Boston, Massachusetts from June 12 to 14.

It was a Gathering of Heroes.

Even those who would otherwise have been classified as villains back in the Philippines were at their heroic best during the three-day gathering of GK advocates and volunteers from all over the world.

Most of the delegates were based in the US, but there was a large delegation from the Philippines that included Vice-President Noli de Castro; Senators Kiko Pangilinan and Migz Zubiri; Congressman Rufus Rodriguez; Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap; Metro Manila Mayors Jojo Binay of Makati, Freddie Tinga of Taguig and Jun Bernabe of Paranaque; Governors LRay Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, Sally Ante Lee of Sorsogon and Victor Yap of Tarlac; provincial Mayors Dennis Go of Gerona, Tarlac, Tito Arion of Daet, Camarines Norte; and Sonia Lorenzo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija; and Brig. Gen. Natalio Escarona III, Marine Corps Deputy Commander and Commander of the Marine Forces in Southern Philippines. There were two other provincial mayors, one from Iloilo and the other from Southern Leyte whose names I failed to note.

Among the former cabinet officials present were Nonong Cruz, DND, and Cito Lorenzo, Agriculture. Lorenzo is among the key movers of GK.

There were also delegates from Malaysia, Colombia and India and a large delegation from Singapore, which will host the next summit in 2010. The Colombia and India delegates said they would like to adopt the GK concept in their home countries.

Friday and Saturday, June 12 and 13, were spent on GK testimonials, an exercise in restoring faith in men and hope for the nation. Both days saw the public officials talk about the impact of GK on their respective constituencies and their own efforts to adopt the "GK Way" in their governance.

The unspoken rivalry between Makati, Taguig and Paranaque as the most progressive Metro Manila cities with enlightened policies and comprehensive social services for their residents was obvious in the presentations of Binay, Tinga and Bernabe. They all spoke with pride of their respective accomplishments. Despite my cynicism, I noted that the claims were grounded in fact.

I must confess to being partial to Makati and to Paranaque, being a resident of the latter and having created the slogan for the former ("Makati—Mahalin natin. Atin ito") over two decades ago. But after listening to Tinga speak, I could not help being impressed.

Another truly admirable presentation was that made by Gov. LRay Villafuerte of Camarines Sur ("Just call us CamSur"). The young son of a traditional politician, Luis Villafuerte of the Lowest House of Congress, dispelled the old saying that one cannot expect good fruit from a tree of questionable qualities (of course, the elder Villafuerte washed his hands of responsibility for the reprehensible plot to railroad the Con-Ass, so maybe he deserves some credit).

In the few years he has been in office, LRay Villafuerte, who currently chairs the League of Provinces of the Philippines, has transformed his province into one of the most progressive in the country, and the fastest growing in terms of investments, tourist traffic and revenues.

In recognition of his accomplishments, he was named Outstanding Young Person of the World by

the Junior Chamber International for Business and Entrepreneurship and conferred the TOYM Award for Entrepreneurship in Exports by the Philippine Jaycees. He also received the Tourism Entrepreneur of the Philippines Award from the Department of Tourism and the Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship.

In subsequent conversations I had with Jojo Binay and Jun Bernabe, I pointed out the contrast between what I had heard from them and what was routinely written about the national government, specifically about the occupants of Malacañang and Congress.

"The real hope of the nation are the LGUs," said Binay. "If, at the city and municipal level, there is progressive governance and a delivery of social services, the provinces will follow suit. And the rest of the country will also be progressive."

To say that Binay provides adequate social services to his constituents is actually an understatement. Makati has a hospital and a university for its citizens and even the squatters who have been relocated to a 3.2-hectare location in San Jose Del Monte are entitled to unheard-of privileges.

Unlike other cities that ejected their squatters, relocated them to far-flung places and left them to fend for themselves, Makati has allowed former "informal settlers" to avail of the city's social services, including free education.

A project of GK and the Makati government, the "Dreamland" will have 480 homes in a community complete with a school, a medical clinic and a chapel. Makati purchased the land and provides the civil works and community facilities while GK handles project management, as well as the spiritual and moral guidance required to truly transform the former slum dwellers.

In his presentation, Binay said that the city has provided attractive tax incentives to private companies that have contributed to the project, such that, in one pledging session alone, they raised P11 million.

Despite owning a home in Paranaque for the past 41 years, it was only at the GK Global Summit that I

met Jun Bernabe, a junior of the multiple-term mayor Florencio Bernabe, Sr. But he impressed me with his vision for the city and its improved services.

I acknowledged that I actually had a pleasant experience at city hall on my last trip to Manila. I had decided to apply for a senior citizen's card, having heard about the many privileges enjoyed by people in that age category. I had expected the usual long wait and disinterested over-the-counter attitude of the stereotypical government employee. But not in that instance. When I asked how I could apply for the senior's card, I was ushered by a clerk to another office in a far corner of the building and entrusted to a team that immediately attended to my needs. In 15 minutes, I had my senior's card, along with literature on privileges and how I could avail of them.

Two other mayors who should have been present at the GK event and would have bared impressive city histories were Sonny Belmonte of Quezon City and Bayani Fernando of Marikina. They, too, have proven the validity of Binay's thesis that true progress and reform can happen at the local level.

One can argue that the Gawad Kalinga Global Summit simply allowed the government officials present to show their "good side" but that they inevitably have their "bad" side—the side of kickbacks, overpricing, ghost employees, monopoly of businesses and the rackets and every conceivable sin attached to politicians.

But that, precisely, is what I find admirable in Gawad Kalinga and its founder, Tony Meloto.

Two years ago, at the 10th Filipinas Magazine Achievement Awards—which usually confers the honor only to Filipinos in America—we made an exception of Tony Meloto—we gave him an Award for International Achievement.

In doing so, I pointed out that, while Meloto is a *bona fide* hero, his real heroism is in his ability to bring out the heroes in everyone else.

Maybe, Meloto should be asked to clean out the Pig Sty by the Pasig. ■

Rizal and the martyrs of our time



ROSES & THORNS
Alejandro R. Roces

MUCH has been said through time about Jose Rizal, the man we know from our history books to be the great Philippine national hero, martyred for defending the cause of the nation and its people during the Spanish occupation. He, to me, is still unmatched as the most remarkable Filipino in history, with his multiple skills and extraordinary intelligence and wit. Years after his execution, his story of heroism still echo, though sometimes, its significance lost in the repetitive stories commonly told about his life and death, and the recitation of important events and achievements surrounding his personhood.

Without mentioning his moving literary works like *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* and his indefatigable advocacy for freedom and democracy for his country that led to his martyrdom, the man that we came to know as Jose Rizal from history is a great person in himself—a man of character the likes of whom is hard to come by these days. In fact, his words and deeds became a stirring example and inspiration to other Filipinos who would later become enshrined in the pages of history as great heroes in their time. One of these heroes is Andres Bonifacio, who established the revolutionary organization called Katipunan from the civic organization La Liga Filipina that Rizal organized. Katipunan mounted a fierce campaign for independence

from the Spanish colonizers and Emilio Aguinaldo, who later became the first president of the Republic, was one of the more prominent leaders who joined the spreading revolt waged by the Katipunan. We can count other great men and women who were inspired by Rizal's selfless cause and with the same ardour advocated for the rights and liberty of the Filipino people.

His thirst for knowledge was so intense that, unlike frivolous young men born to wealthy families, he pursued varied fields of knowledge with no less than sobersaliente at a pace likened to a race. At 21 years old, he travelled alone to Europe to study medicine upon learning that his mother was going blind. Four years later at 25, he would complete his studies and practice in ophthalmology, during which time he also learned to speak German. And as his family's funds dried up and away from his family, he persevered, not minding the sacrifices he had to make to finish his career. Until the age of 35 before his trial and execution, he continued to master various skills and subjects from the arts and letters to business and economics, to the sciences and sports, showing the high importance he gave to educating oneself. The ophthalmologist was also a sculptor, painter, educator, farmer, historian, playwright and journalist. He wrote his novels in Spanish, the language of the elite, at a time when there were less than 11 million Filipinos.

The greatest example he bequeathed to generations after him and up to the present was the peaceful but inspiring way that he awakened

the consciousness of a people who were then nestled in a convenient but shackling colonial rule and how he, through the values and ideals he espoused in his writings, and a brilliant satirical way with which he described people and situations, instituted reforms in a society beholden to a religious culture that is at the same time foreign and repressive.

Rizal said, "It is a useless life that is not consecrated to a great ideal. It is like a stone wasted on the field without becoming a part of any edifice." Hence, he made his life, not only a useful one, but one that excelled and shines brightly to this day. He is the cornerstone that served as a strong foundation of Philippine democracy.

To honor the memory of a great martyr, I dedicate this column to seven slain Marines who were killed last week during fierce encounters with the Abu Sayyaf group in Sulu. Sargeants Rafael Quinones and Wilhelm Alvarez, Privates First Class Randy Sacro, Marlon Quidep, Robert Fedochino, Willy Cabilite, and Dioan Tamayo were the frontliners in the military effort to rescue Italian Eugenio Vagni of the International Committee of the Red Cross still being held hostage after six months. These soldiers were also part of the team that rescued a popular TV broadcaster and her 2 cameramen last year. I salute them as martyrs and modern day heroes as well as the other military and police personnel who have sacrificed their lives to preserve the country's honor and uphold the people's peace and freedom.

More than a century after his death, the memory of Rizal's life and works empowers and inspires Filipinos and even other nationalities to emerge as unique and outstanding people in a new and complex global village. Despite its many problems, our race stands proud and jubilant because it has a hero like Rizal. (*Philstar.com*)



Main Office:
1150 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904
Tel: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854
e-mail: info@asianjournalinc.com
http://www.asianjournal.com

Manila Office:
Suite 208, The Manila Bank Corp., Bldg.
6772 Ayala Ave., Makati City 1226
Tel.: (632) 893-1720 • Fax: (632) 813-8746

New York and New Jersey:
5 Penn Plaza, Ste. 1932, New York, NY 10001
Tel.: (212) 655-5426 • Fax: (212) 655-9241

2500 Plaza Five, Harborside Financial Center,
Jersey City, NJ 07311
Tel.: (201) 484-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

Las Vegas Sales Office:
3700 W. Desert Inn Road
Las Vegas, NV 89102
Tel.: (702) 792-6678 • Fax: (702) 792-6879

ROGER LAGMAY ORIEL
Publisher & Chairman of the Board

CORA MACABAGDAL-ORIEL
President & Executive Editor

BELLE M. SISON
Executive Vice President
Los Angeles Asian Journal

MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA
Senior Vice President
Los Angeles Asian Journal

IVY MANALANG
Vice President - Marketing

MOMAR VISAYA
Editor-in-Chief

JOSEPH PERALTA
Associate Editor

SHARON ANN BATHAN
Features Editor

MARIA LOURDES HALILI
Advertising Editor

DANTE SAMBLAY
Art Director

ANDY TECSON / TED TALAG
Photographers

BANDER LAW FIRM, LLP
Legal Counsel

ADVERTISING AND ADVERTORIAL POLICIES

Asian Journal Publications, Inc. ("AJPI") reserves the right to refuse to publish, in its sole and absolute discretion, any advertising and advertorial material submitted for publication by client. ("Client's Material")

Submission of an advertisement or advertorial to an AJPI sales representative does not constitute a commitment by AJPI to publish a Client's Material. AJPI has the option to correctly classify any Client's Material and to delete objectionable words or phrases.

Client represents and warrants that a Client's Material does not and will not contain any language or material which is libelous, slanderous or defamatory or invades any rights of privacy or publicity; does not and will not violate or infringe upon, or give rise to any adverse claim with respect to any common law or other right whatsoever (including, without limitation, any copyright, trademark, service mark or contract right) of any person or entity, or violate any other applicable law; and is not the subject of any litigation or claim that might give rise to any litigation.

Publication of a Client's Material does not constitute an agreement to continue publication. Client agrees and covenants to indemnify AJPI and its officers against any and all loss, liability, damage, expenses, cost, charges, claims, actions, causes of action, recoveries, judgments, penalties, including outside attorneys' fees (individually and collectively "Claims") which AJPI may suffer by reason of (1) Client's breach of any of the representations, warranties and agreements herein or (2) any Claims by any third party relating in any way to Client's Material.

AJPI will not be liable for failure to publish any Client's Material as requested or for more than one incorrect insertion of a Client's Material. In the event of an error, or omission in printing or publication of a Client's Material, AJPI shall be limited to an adjustment for the space occupied by the error, with maximum liability being cancellation of the cost of the first incorrect advertisement or republication of the correct advertisement.

Under no circumstances shall Asian Publications, Inc. be liable for consequential damages of any kind.

ASIAN JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS, INC. publishes the Los Angeles Asian Journal, published twice a week; the Orange County and Inland Empire Asian Journal, Northern California Asian Journal, Las Vegas Asian Journal and the New York / New Jersey Asian Journal which are published once a week and distributed to Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange Counties, Northern California, Las Vegas and New York and New Jersey respectively.

Articles published in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Letters to the Editor are welcome. Letters must contain complete name and return address. The materials, however, are subject to editing and revisions.

Contributions and advertising deadlines are every Mondays and Thursdays. For advertising rates and other information, please call the L.A. office at (213) 250-9797 or the Las Vegas Sales Office at (702) 792-6678 or send us an email at info@asianjournalinc.com