

Rizal Park to rise in Australia

by PIA LEE-BRAGO
Philstar.com

A 2.2-HECTARE property in the city of Campbelltown in New South Wales will be developed into the Rizal Park in Australia, according to an embassy report.

In a report to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Consul General Eva Betita of the Philippine Consulate General in Sydney said the Rizal Park will rise in what used to be an empty reserve owned by the city government.

In 1988, a group of Filipino-Australians and friends petitioned the city council of Campbelltown to name it Rizal Park.

The project is the brainchild of the Rizal Park Movement, a group of five Filipino-Australian associations that banded together in 2006 with the com-

mon vision of making the reserve into a park.

In June 2007, Campbelltown formally designated the reserve as a park to be funded by the city council.

The Philippine Consulate General in Sydney has been assisting the Rizal Park Movement's project through endorsements and gathering support from other Filipino-Australian associations throughout the state of New South Wales.

The Rizal Park project received A\$120,000 Federal Government grant from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, to be used for the initial construction of the park, including a playground and picnic facilities for use by the general public.

In addition, the Campbelltown city council will provide another A\$140,000 for further improvements.

The construction plan for the park was presented to Campbelltown Mayor Russell Matheson, Consul General Betita, Rizal Park Movement chair Lourdes Kaiser, Knight Com-



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mander Maximilio Lopez of the Knights of Rizal, and members of the Filipino-Australian Community in Campbelltown last May 29.

The Rizal Park Movement plans to further improve the park with landscaping, shade structures, barbecue facilities, car park, and a cycle way.

The Order of the Knights of Rizal in New South Wales has also committed to commission a statue of Dr. Jose Rizal to be placed prominently in the area.

Campbelltown is a prosperous industrial-agricultural city and hosts the third largest concentration of Filipino-Australians numbering 4,108. ■

Why Lacson quit—pick a reason

by MICHAEL LIM UBAC & TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

HE had made up his mind since the other Sunday, the eve of his 61st birthday which was on June 1.

"In my heart of hearts, I asked myself, 'Will I be able to last in that kind of campaign?'"

"Let's be practical and realistic about it, campaigning started last year (and) if you can't keep up with the others, you will be left behind," said Sen. Panfilo Lacson, by way of explaining his abrupt withdrawal from the 2010 presidential derby.

"The practice now is to spend—even if it's still too early—so much money. That's my primary reason—I have nothing to spend—and I pity my supporters who are mostly volunteers," Lacson said in an interview over dzXL radio last June 6.

He said some volunteers even shelled out their own money, but "it's not enough."

Lacson's other reason for backing out was his "frustration" over the way campaigns and elections are conducted in the country.

Character, competence

"*Yan kunektado sa una, kung wala kang pera magpahinog ka at wala kang ilalaban*, (Connections for one, if you have no money you have nothing to fight with)," he said.

He said he would support someone with "character" and "competence," and "someone who's not a robber."

As for running for vice president instead, he said that everything was fluid at this point but he wasn't about to make the first move and ask to be picked as someone's running mate.

Lacson had announced his intention to run for president in an interview in the Senate last month.

But just before the start of last June 5's televised ANC Leadership Forum at the University of the Philippines, he announced his withdrawal from the race in a pre-recorded statement, citing the huge expense of waging a nationwide campaign.

Bow to reality

In his words, he "bowed to that reality."

The day before, a former subordinate in the Philippine National Police where Lacson once served as director general returned to Manila, promising to reveal all in a double murder case in which Lacson has been implicated.

Former police Supt. Cezar Mancao in an affidavit said that he heard Lacson order another subordinate, then Chief Supt. Michael Ray Aquino, to kill publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer in 2000. Dacer's driver, Emmanuel Corbito, was killed along with him.

Lacson has said that he would refrain from commenting on the Mancao affidavit until it has been subscribed.

"I don't know," said Lacson's ally and seat mate, Sen. Loren Legarda in a phone interview, when asked if the Dacer-Corbito case might be the reason Lacson had withdrawn.

She said Lacson had not spoken to her about his plans.

"But at least Senator Lacson will be freer to attack the administration since he can't be accused of politicking now," Legarda said.

For Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Lacson, a 1971 graduate of the Philippine Military Academy, is "trying to do his best in a bad situation—to protect his flanks and conserve power."

"Unlike in military parlance, in the game of politics, tactics can mean strategic (moves)," Pimentel said.

Pimentel also cited "dwindling fund support and 'problems with Zamora, et al.'" as reasons Lacson may have dropped out.

Backers abandon him

Businessman Manny Zamora and his brother, San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, have reportedly left the Lacson camp to join his rival, presidential aspirant Sen. Manuel Villar Jr.

Former Surigao del Sur Rep. Prospero Pichay concurred, saying it was possible that Lacson decided to withdraw after losing his financial backers.

Pichay, who ran for the Senate in 2007 under the administration party but lost despite reportedly being the biggest-spending candidate, said he found Lacson's reason for withdrawing credible.

"That could only be a valid reason. The guys who bankrolled his campaign in 2004—the Zamora brothers (Manny, Buddy and Ronnie)—are no longer supporting him," Pichay said in a phone interview.

He said Manny and Ronnie Zamora were supporting Villar while Buddy was throwing his lot with Sen. Manuel "Mar" Roxas II, Pichay said.

"It's easy to run for president. But when you start to look into your pockets, it's very difficult. So the presidential candidates solicit contributions from businessmen. In the end, they are indebted to businessmen," he said. ■























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Comelec set to award poll automation deal to Smartmatic

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) is all set to award the P11.3-billion poll automation project to Smartmatic Total Information Management Inc. within the week, moving a step closer to the computerization of the 2010 national and local elections.

While the Comelec has the power to reject the recommendation, Chairman Jose Melo last Jun 7 said that they are more inclined to approve it at this time.

"Right now, the arm of Comelec (in the bidding) is the Special Bid and Award Committee (SBAC), so we have to come up with very good reasons in not accepting their recommendations," he said.

Melo expressed confidence that there would be "practically nil" chances of the en banc not following the recommendations of the SBAC.

"I think, altogether, SBAC did a very well done job. Nonetheless, we have to look at the reports," he said.

However, Melo said that if there is one stumbling block against Smartmatic, it would be the incident where one of the batteries of the Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) overheated during last month's end-to-end demonstration allegedly due to faulty wiring.

The Comelec chair said the overheating of batteries of the PCOS was one of the major concerns aired by the official bidding observers.

"Principally, we will just be asking for additional requirements on the provider, Smartmatic, concerning the wire. The wires shouldn't have burned. These are engineers. They know it," Melo said.

Smartmatic officials, however, told the Comelec-SBAC that the incident was only due to the wrong usage of wires to connect the battery to the PCOS machine.

The SBAC accepted the consortium's explanation and allowed the restart of the demo after understanding that the machines have automatic shutdown capabilities in case anything irregular happens, including fire.

But Melo stressed that it is not as simple as Smartmatic made it appear.

"The machine itself was not affected but you should still have an efficient wire or else you cannot use the machine even if you have batteries," he pointed out. (Philstar.com)