

## Corruption bombshell hardly news anymore

The Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy has once again found the Philippines, as in previous surveys, among the most corrupt economies, along with Thailand and China. The conclusion comes from its annual survey of 13 national economies in Asia (excluding Myanmar and Bangladesh). The group regionally polls about 1,400 respondents, expatriate businessmen, in the 13 countries. The Philippines scored 9.0. In PERC's rating system, 10 is the worst and 0 is best score.

In past years, shocking revelations were made – and they remain unresolved – about the P728 million fertilizer scam, the Diosdado Macapagal Highway, the US\$14 million Impsa deal bribe, the P2.5 billion election computerization contract and about a dozen other

### OTHERVOICES what they say

#### The Manila Times

cases. None of these – except the Impsa bribery allegations made by former congressmen Mark Jimenez and Willie Villarama – was located exactly at the Palace by the accusers.

Since the third quarter of 2007, the issue of corruption has rocked the nation with more intensity. The accounts of brown bags filled with money for congressmen and governors handed out in Malacañang gave the anti-Arroyo politicians and commentators a large carcass

to feast on. The accusations of greed, overpricing and cover-ups surrounding the ZTE National Broadband Network deal with China – made originally by then-National Economic Development Secretary Romulo Neri at the Senate and later detailed by businessmen Joey de Venecia, Rodolfo Lozada Jr and Dante Madriaga – could cause the downfall of the Arroyo administration.

The allegations and the media attention they received help project the Philippines as an economy drowning in corruption. On Thursday, the Asian Development Bank – whose headquarters are in Metro Manila – declared that the Philippines has fallen behind its neighbors in economic development because it has failed to arrest rampant corruption.



## It's taken a foreigner to boldly point out what really ails us

### PINOYDIMSUM observations

#### Isabel T Escoda



Those of us following the reports about the protests escalating at home and abroad against the Arroyo administration could be excused for thinking that the government will soon be removed. But from this distance, it looks to me more like business as usual, with “walang nagbabago” being the continuing theme of the tired old dramas regularly being played out in Manila.

Is it possible for People Power to be restaged in the country which invented it? If so, would it be possible for us Pinoys to feel proud once again about doing something extraordinary – but soon after wouldn't we sink back into depression and apathy because we haven't got the strength of character to do the really hard work of reforming both our institutions and ourselves?

Will the rage felt towards Mrs Arroyo just keep on boiling, with nothing much to show but a lot of angry citizens? Will we glibly call hers the worst administration in our country's history, forgetting the magnitude of Ferdinand Marcos' and Joseph Estrada's crimes? Will we go on glossing over the saintly Cory Aquino's ineptitude for having squandered the opportunity to make real changes at a time when

suffering that his country, South Korea, underwent during the war in 1950-1953, which resulted in its becoming one of the world's poorest nations. Koreans then experienced famine and deprivation, but they gradually overcame their adversities and eventually succeeded in turning their country into a developed one. They had few natural resources, but by pulling together patriotically, they became proud citizens of their revitalized nation.

Jaeyoun pointed to how the government at the time sent many of its citizens abroad, specifically to the US and West Germany, to study science and engineering. When those students returned home, they applied what they had learned to help rebuild their country. What a contrast between that and the countless Filipinos who leave their country and never wish to return. Crediting his parents with having

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everyone rallied behind her? Will we think that the endless graft among minor officials and ordinary citizens is excusable because it's a reaction to bad governance? Will we keep cursing the system of government we inherited from the Americans?

One big question is whether the Philippines will ever attain maturity and respect and overcome its long-entrenched corruption. That word, “corruption” is the excuse we use *ad nauseum* to explain why we continue to be an economically depressed nation.

But not too long ago, a young South Korean student studying in Manila named Jaeyoun Kim wrote a fine essay which made the rounds of the Internet. He believes that the Philippines' main problem is not corruption. The fault, he claims, lies in the fact that we Pinoys do not love our country. In other words, we lack patriotism.

It took some nerve for young Jaeyoun to say that, but he can be excused because he wrote eloquently about his sorrow for our nation's poverty even as he pointed to the absence of self-respect and patriotism among too many Pinoys. He described the tremendous

instilled both love of God and country in him, Jaeyoun revealed the way his compatriots practise Catholicism. The type of faith followed by South Korea's large Catholic community obviously differs greatly from our version, which blends superstition with religious beliefs. Jaeyoun apparently knows our psychology well because he urged Filipinos to desist from all the passive praying and *bahala na* attitudes we indulge in which have been fostered the fatalism for which we're famous.

With the South Korean model in mind, can we conclude that our country's narrow tribalism stems from our scattered islands and provinces? Has being homogeneous made it easy for the South Koreans to be united and proud citizens of their nation? Because we tend to care only about our immediate families and clans, is this what has caused our downward spiral into the stagnation?

Jaeyoun Kim ended his essay with this piece of advice: “I want Filipinos to love their neighbors and country as much as they love God [because] love changes people, contexts and relationships. It changes the world.”



### BOOST FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Government spending on infrastructure this year will reach P79.36 billion, a budget committee report says. Of this amount, P36.5 billion will go to the transport sector, P34.7 billion to utilities. Spending on social infrastructure will be about P5.66 billion and information technology P2.2 billion.

## Imelda triumphs but justice grinds ever so slowly

Imelda Romualdez Marcos has new reasons to waltz around.

A case that has dragged on for 17 years has concluded in her acquittal on 32 counts of illegally siphoning dollars out of Philippine territory into foreign shores. The Marcos family allegedly made the transfers, ranging from \$US5 billion to US\$10 billion, between 1968 and 1976.

Madam, of course, is ecstatic, saying justice has been served. “I hope that the rest of these cases will be finished while I am still alive so that I will be able to fulfill my dreams for the Filipino people.” She is talking about the 10 criminal cases that remain pending with the Sandiganbayan.

Marcos' main defense was that it was not she nor her husband but a close family friend, Roberto Benedicto, who made the actual

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#### Manila Standard Today

transfers to Swiss banks. In the meantime, the existence of the accounts nor their links to the dictator was not disputed.

In fact, on a separate occasion, Mrs Marcos reportedly acknowledged such Swiss deposits and said they started as a US\$5 million account that purportedly came from the excess campaign money that her husband had set aside for his 1969 reelection bid. The Manila judge said that the prosecution failed to

establish Marcos' guilt beyond reasonable doubt, and that it also was responsible for the long years of delay by frequently re-scheduling the hearings.

Meanwhile, the former first lady dreams – nebulously, of course – to “alleviate the plight of poor Filipinos by focusing on the true, the beautiful and the strong in our character” by putting up a Marcos Foundation. She gets away with this talk because nowadays, people feel it is all right to indulge the narcissism of an octogenarian and focus instead on the corrupt acts of our present leaders.

If nothing is done to address the delays in court proceedings – especially high-profile cases like this one – resolutions on the cases the public is so agitated about right now will be reduced to the same level of resignation, or worse, indifference.

