

OPINION

The Philippines in the Asian Century

FROM A DISTANCE By Carmen N. Pedrosa (The Philippine Star) Updated November 22, 2009 12:00 AM

Although it was not said in so many words, the arrival of "The Asian Century" dominated the Apec Summit in Singapore. In this context it does not refer only to the big boys like China, India or Japan but to the entire region. That includes the Philippines as a founding member of Asean. We will be riding on the crest of exuberance in a new world where Asia leads. At present the focus is on its role, particularly China, in world economic recovery.

But we should seize the opportunity and use every means within our capability to be part of this preeminence of Asia in a changing world. It is not just economic. There are other aspects in which the Philippines can bring up the region with it. For example, I think that Pacquiao's successes in boxing should be shared with other countries in our region.

Singapore's Finance Minister, Tharman Shanmugaratnam said the hope of the world is not banking on US consumers demand nor will it come back in the near future. The Apec meeting will be remembered as a turning point not just because of China's rise as a global economic power. It is also about the marked a historic shift in the balance of economic power from the Americas to Asia.

This is the time for the Philippines to remind both Asians and Americans that it was this country that fought for its independence against two colonizing superpowers and the first to establish however short-lived it was, a constitutional republic. There will be a lot of revisiting to be made by all countries that had once been colonized in the wake of the turn of events.

Dr. Goonatilake, writes on the renewed ties between Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Although it was criticized by Western media, the Sri Lanka scholar offers a different perspective. "With the rise of Asia as the centre of economic, political and cultural focus in the world, we can together make Buddhism again the unifying force in Asia as well as across the new globalised world at a time when Buddhism is being widely spread in the Western world."

This does not mean that the US should leave Asia anytime soon or that the Asians want the US out either. Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute put it succinctly: "Washington's influence will remain significant even as America's dominance fades. Nevertheless, Secretary Clinton should use her time hop-scotching across Asian capitals preparing for the emerging new order. Ultimately, the United States will be more secure if it shifts primary responsibility onto its friends to promote regional stability. Washington should accommodate rather than resist the rise of the Asian Century."

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I don't know why it is being said that congressmen were reviving what critics call "Cha-cha." Constitutional reform has been on the table for a long time now in the Lower House. The Committee for Constitutional Amendments headed by Chairman Victor Ortega has been working on the various proposals for a constitutional convention as the best mode for amending the Constitution for some time.

Committee members voted and the majority approved to carry on deliberations with the view that reforms are necessary. As Chairman Ortega said in one meeting "Even if we were only to change one thing, that is to have a proper provision for constitutional amendment, we would have done a great service to the nation."

He was responding to criticism and doubts whether constitutional reforms were necessary. How can a constitution not have a proper provision for amendment? Well, that is the current state of the 1987 Constitution. Because of an "error" or a lack of one word, the Senate has been able to frustrate every move at amendments.

To remove any suspicion that this is a ploy for self-interest to extend their terms, the committee has dedicated its work

towards a constitutional convention.

Ortega sponsored the resolution calling for the convening of a constitutional convention (con-con) to propose amendments to the Constitution.

In the proposal delegates to the convention would be elected on October 25, 2010 together with the barangay elections. Three billion has been approved for this. The election of constitutional delegates can piggy back on this appropriation to save costs.

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A columnist in another newspaper called me to say he was so taken by what I wrote in my column yesterday. Barack Obama phrase "Do not let the perfect be an enemy of the good" rang a bell in his brain. He had heard it before. The original quote came from Voltaire, a hero of the French revolution. "The perfect is the enemy of the good."

He agreed with me that many things happening to the Philippines today comes from this unfortunate thinking. It happens everywhere. Here is a reaction from an American who happened to be working as a scientist in Prague from 1967-70.

"The Velvet Revolution was a long time coming. That some portion of the population looks back fondly on what existed before is not a surprise. My experience in Prague (as a single father) was that child care was fabulous (and virtually free), that health care was universal, excellent (and virtually free), and that men and women interacted largely as equals. Some of these aspects of life have suffered in the transition from socialism to capitalism. My Czech friends were always hoping for socialism with a human face, instead of the inhuman face presented by communism. What they seem to have gotten instead, along with most of us in the west, is capitalism with an inhuman face. Better than what they had, for sure, but far from perfect.

"The beauty of the Czech people, whose national hero for most of the 20th century was the lovable Schwejk, is that they don't demand perfection. Wisdom born of centuries of living in the cauldron that is central Europe. We could use some of that wisdom here."

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