

MANILA MAIL: PAL workers ask if Tan has bought PH

Written by FEDERICO D. PASCUAL
Thursday, 13 October 2011 21:40



HYPERBOLE: We cannot blame displaced Philippine Airlines workers for saying that PAL owner Lucio Tan must have bought the entire country already — a hyperbole, all right, but still a valid comment.

The workers were reacting to the latest Supreme Court order recalling its decision favoring dismissed PAL workers and ordering backpay for them.

They saw the odd reversal in the light of previous court rulings such as:

Last month, the Court of Appeals allowed PAL to proceed with its P730-million damage suit against former pilots who staged a crippling strike in June 1998.

On Sept. 29, the National Labor Relations Commission threw out the unfair labor practice complaint filed by the ground crew union for PAL's alleged refusal to start negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement.

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Last week, the CA awarded P68 million to Tan's Asia Brewery Inc. arising from a damage suit it had filed against rival San Miguel Corp.

The CA has ruled favorably also on the airline's petition questioning the excise tax levied by the Bureau on Internal Revenue on its imported jet fuel.

The SC approved the P491-million tax refund claim of Fortune Tobacco Corp., a member of the Lucio Tan Group of Companies.

GMA RAPS: Maybe Justice Secretary Leila de Lima should talk with President Noynoy Aquino more often.

Shortly after the President announced in a media forum that charges would be filed "by November" against former President Gloria Arroyo and her family members, de Lima said her department could not give such a definite date.

"That one I cannot make an expressed commitment because all the cases are already going through the process," she said.

"I would not want to preempt the outcome of the investigations."

Similar to the de Lima line, Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales has also said that her office was not unduly rushing charges.

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She said they want to make sure the cases are air-tight before filing them.

DOUBLE STANDARDS: Secretary Ronald Llamas sounded cocky when he said he was “willing to resign if the President asks me to” as an offshoot of the scandal over a high-power assault rifle being found in his car when it met with an accident in Quezon City last Friday.

It is presumptuous for a Cabinet official like Llamas, who is presidential adviser for political affairs, to say he was “willing to resign” — because that implies he has the option of being not willing to resign at all.

Most Cabinet officials, including Llamas, serve at the pleasure of the President.

As far as we know, he is not as well-placed as DILG Undersecretary Rico Puno who declared during the Luneta hostage fiasco that the President could not just fire him.

Malacañang should be alerted that its handling of the Llamas incident reeks of double standards.

There is the impression that Llamas is getting special kid-glove treatment.

CLEAN THE MOUTH: Dredging of Pampanga River in scattered sections along its length will not help lessen the flooding problem if the idea is to make it deeper so the water will flow faster and more freely out into Manila Bay.

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Whatever section is dredged or dug will just be covered again as the water carrying soil and other deposits flows over the length of the river.

Scattered dredging may give the desired impression that the government is doing something, but it is a big waste of time and resources with zero impact on mitigating overflows.

In the layman's view of plain folk in the affected area, a better alternative is to:

- * Enable the river to deepen itself naturally by clearing and deepening its mouth, thereby removing the dirt and man-built obstructions there and massively and continuously dredging it.

- * Restore the river's original width (or even widen it in places where it is feasible) by removing obstructions such as ponds, fish cages and fishpens.

SELF-CLEANING: The idea with clearing and deepening the mouth instead of (or in addition to) the length of the river is that with a freer flow, the water itself will carry out into the bay the silt and dirt that has accumulated along its length.

In effect, it will enable the river to clean and desilt itself.

Thus made deeper, it can hold more water.

Of course, there are other details such as periodic high tide that impedes outflow to the bay and climate change that has become a stock excuse for government's failure to cope with disruptive

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weather disturbances.

CINEMATIC BLAST: Many years ago, then Gov. Lito Lapid made high drama when he rode to the mouth of the Pampanga River and blasted one of many fishpond dikes obstructing the flow.

Apparently he was convinced that their presence was against public interest.

After that isolated cinematic moment, however, the pond owners flexed their influence and that effectively stopped the removal of the ponds.

The talk in the area is that these elaborate ponds and dikes, some of them concrete, are owned and/or operated by big (meaning untouchable) businessmen and politicians.

POLITICAL WILL: Obviously, one urgent task is for the government to muster political will and remove these obstructions at the river mouth and along its length.

If the government cannot do this, the affected communities might as well resign to the perennial floods with the attendant loss of lives and property, as well as the disruption of normal human activity and the slow death by drowning of the low-lying towns of Pampanga and Bulacan.

Stressing our main point, let us CLEAR AND DEEPEN THE MOUTH of Pampanga River, which used to be so robust that Spanish colonizers called it Rio Grande.

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Other factors contribute to the flooding, but let us pay attention to the river mouth.

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