

*Second of a Series by Ado Paglinawan*

## **Part Two: Cory Aquino dropped the Ball on the Parañaque Spillway**

{xtypo\_quote} What was vogue of a standard those days was for the Aquino Government to destroy and put into oblivion everything that has the Ferdinand-and-Imelda Marcos brand on it. Well this issue would have been buried with Cory Aquino until Felino Palafox started opening his mouth. {/xtypo\_quote}

As the Florendos and I parted ways, I told them that having trained under the late Rafael M. Salas in 1967, my privy to high-level discussions on urban planning and infrastructure modernization was extensive.

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This was because whenever I was not with the-then Executive Secretary, I was actually in a sort of practicum in the Commission on Reorganization, the body that was primarily in charge of reengineering government.

This becomes pertinent since in my article previous to this, I shared Felino Palafox's lack of recollection why the Parañaque Spillway never saw daylights. As an aftermath of Ondoy that has now elevated itself to a matter of national-security interest, I feel it a patriotic challenge to dig the painful past.

*Editor's Note:* To read the first part of this series, please click on this link, [A People Caught in Its Own Dung](#)

Let us begin by saying that Palafox's story was incomplete.

The Parañaque Spillway was not conceived in 1977 when Freeman Fox and Associates, a Hong Kong-based urban planning consultancy firm completed the Metro Manila Transport, Land Use and Development Planning Project.

Following forty days from October 11 to November 20 in 1970, three super typhoons – Sening (Joan), Titang (Kate) and Yoling (Patsy) caused a death toll of more than 2,000. At that time, the combination of the three was the worst to hit our country since 1947 as the damage wrecked havoc to the City of Manila, its suburban areas and nearby provinces, in terms of flooding and damage to property. (It would not be until November 1991 when Typhoon Uring would claim more than 5,000 lives.)

As an offshoot of that devastation, President Ferdinand Marcos immediately ordered the updating of studies on flooding and other such waterways issues in Greater Manila. When the comprehensive report came, he issued Presidential Decree No. 3 in 1972 primarily to rehabilitate and reconstruct damaged infrastructure facilities caused by calamities.

Corollary to this, Mr. Marcos also created in 1973 a policy think tank called Task Force on Human Settlements to look into Greater Manila's problems brought about by its rapid population increase and urban growth. The body was recommended by the Philippine delegation who participated in a United Nations conference in Stockholm in 1972 where the concept of human settlements was first introduced.

It was primarily on the basis of the recommendation of this think tank that in 1974, President Marcos enacted Presidential Decree 475 to add more teeth to his earlier decree going to the extent of actually appropriating funds for public works for various projects including 85-million pesos for the Napindan Hydraulic Control Structure, 52-million pesos the Manggahan Floodway and 62-million pesos for the Parañaque Spillway.

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Due to the increasingly popular demand for effective solutions to nagging problems affecting many if not most of the local jurisdictions comprising the metropolis, such as the alarming increase in slum areas, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, crime, disastrous flooding, and lack of affordable housing, then President Marcos further created the Metropolitan Manila Area (MMA) and the Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC) to put rhyme and reason in managing the affairs of the country's premier urban center.

The MMA, with a total land area of 636 square kilometers and a population then of about 7-million, comprised of 17 local government units, namely: Manila, Quezon, Pasay, Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela, Marikina, San Juan, Mandaluyong, Makati, Taguig, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Pateros, Pasig and Muntinlupa. The Metro Manila Commission was given both executive and legislative powers. Appointed Chairman of MMC and concurrently Governor of Metro Manila was then First Lady, Imelda Marcos.

This is where Palafox's story now connects as he unearths a study completed in 1977 of which he was a part. The Metroplan sponsored by the World Bank, precisely confirmed the urgency of earlier public works concepts and relevantly provided for a framework for feasibility of component projects for multilateral funding.

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It set the motion for a series of World Bank funding for flood control.

For instance the river walls of Pasig River were raised to accommodate a water level of 14 meters—a level that corresponds to the expected depth of flood with a 10-year return period.

Twelve operating-pump stations, each with a capacity to move 167-cubic meters of floodwaters per second were procured and put into operation. The pump stations are operational in Aviles, Balete, Binondo, Libertad,

Makati

, Paco, Pandacan, Quiapo, Sta. Clara, Tripa de Gallina, and

Valencia

. There are floodgates in Escolta, Pandacan, and Santo Bañez. This is sufficient to limit flooding, however, to about 0.2 meter depths in the vicinity of the pumping stations.

But Metroplan's main highlight was greater than the traditional flooding we have been altogether familiar in Greater Manila. It identified the Marikina Valley, the western shores of Laguna de Bay, and the Manila Bay coastal area prone to catastrophic flooding, earthquakes, and possible changes in topography.

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The first focus revolved around Marikina City because it is most susceptible to flooding because it is a valley, with its Marikina River collecting water from the Sierra Madre mountain ranges on the east and the Quezon City Capitol Hills on the west.

The Metroplan underscored a combination of infrastructure projects, consisting of the Napindan Hydraulic Control Structure, the Rosario Weir, and the Manggahan Floodway, the Marikina Flood Control Structure, the Marikina Dam and the Parañaque Spillway.

The Napindan Hydraulic Control Structure – at the confluence of Marikina and Pateros-Taguig rivers with Pasig River – was envisioned to prevent or lessen the increase of salinity from Manila Bay and pollution from the Pasig River itself from entering Laguna de Bay during times of reverse flow. This confluence is also the downstream endpoint of the Napindan Channel, which is the upper part of Pasig River that connects to Laguna de Bay. The Napindan project was completed in 1983.

The Rosario Weir is the sluice or floodgate from the Marikina River onto the Manggahan Floodway. The weir was completed in 1984.

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The Manggahan Floodway, on the other hand, was proposed and built to keep the floodwaters out of Metro Manila, particularly in Pasig and Marikina, by diverting the flow to Laguna de Bay. The floodway was completed in 1986.

What the Parañaque Spillway was all about is exactly the answer Palafox gave to his own question “What if Laguna de Bay overflows?” The spillway to be situated further southeast of Makati, was supposed to have been built to siphon runoff from Laguna de Bay when it overtops, onto Manila Bay and the South China Sea.

Why it was urgent and absolutely essential is now what Typhoon Ondoy has fatally confirmed.

### Well Laid-out Plans for Infrastructure

These were well laid-out plans for infrastructure, the sequential implementation of which were necessary to make the whole formula work. Now note the years of completion. Napindan in 1983, the Rosario Weir in 1984 and Manggahan in 1986.

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The construction of the Parañaque Spillway ought to have been started as early as 1986 but that was the year President Marcos was overthrown by the People Power Revolution.

Now who was the president at that time? Why it was Mrs. Corazon Aquino, may her soul rest in peace, but dear Lord, she dropped the ball on the Parañaque Spillway!

She justified her decision saying that the project would have been very expensive as it would cut through middle-class subdivisions.

In truth, I wish I could buy that reason. I mean what was the vogue of a standard those days was for the Aquino Government to destroy and put into oblivion everything that has the Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos brand on it. Well this issue would have been buried with her until Palafox started opening his mouth.

**Editor's Notes:** Then President Cory Aquino also emasculated the annual Defense-Department budget and left it without funds to maintain a fleet of amphibian trucks that

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the Marcos Administration acquired. The amphibian trucks eventually were sold as scrap iron by the whiz kids of the Aquino Dispensation. Why? It was the policy of President Aquino to “demilitarize” (sic) the Philippine military.

As the Philippines wallows amidst the stench of its own decay, George Santayana words should remind Filipinos that those who “cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Looking back, if she just went with the logical flow, the spillway would have long been in place, at definitely a lot cheaper cost than were it to be constructed today, and tens of billions of property damage would have avoided and hundreds of lives would have been saved from Ondoy’s fury.

Before last month, the only other time the Parañaque Spillway provoked another round of discussion was fourteen years after it was mothballed by the Aquino administration. In November 2000, a forum sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science in cooperation with the Tokyo Institute of Technology, the University of the Philippines and De La Salle University, once again raised yellow flags about the Integrated Manila Bay-Laguna Lake System and the Surrounding Watersheds

There Dr. Leonardo Q. Liongson of the University of the Philippines Department of Civil Engineering said that what the Aquino administration endorsed – instead of the Parañaque Spillway – was a ring-dike system.

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In a separate paper, Dr. Doracie B. Zoleta-Nantes an associate professor at the Department of Geography of the UP College of Social Sciences and Philosophy tells us more about this knee-jerk alternative.

The plan chosen was to build road dikes on the Laguna lakeshore to prevent flooding of the circumferential vicinity, and contain water in the lake. It also included construction of silt containment dams on the lake's tributaries to reduce the lake siltation.

As envisioned, the Department of Public Works and the Laguna Lake Development Authority plan to pump water out of Laguna de Bay during the dry season to have more water storage space during the rainy season. This will involve the reverse use of the Manggahan Floodway westward, closure of the Rosario Weir to prevent a backflow to the Marikina River, and opening of the Napindan Control to direct the water westward to the

Pasig  
River  
onto the  
Manila  
Bay

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Besides the diversive planning by the Department of Public Works under Mrs. Aquino, work on the flood-control system almost came to a halt. At end of her term in 1992, an environmental study was submitted and the Environmental Compliance Certificate was issued the next year when Fidel Ramos was already president.

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Today, the road-dike project loan stands suspended by the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation in favor of further research largely due to the mounting opposition to the project by the affected communities and stakeholders around the lake and by their sympathizers and supporters not only in the Philippines but in other Asian countries as well, namely, Japan and Korea. The major issues raised were the massive dislocation of houses, compromising the livelihood of the fishermen and farmers, the ecological damage to the Lake, allegations of defective design, and doubts on whether the dike is the real solution to the floods.

Typhoon Ondoy, however, rendered all these polemics moot and academic, as a month's equivalent of rain was poured down in twelve hours sinking the entire Marikina Valley at levels submerging two storey houses while at the same time overflowing Laguna de Bay and inundating lakeshore towns.

Ondoy showed that the Aquino alternative would have been more catastrophic if the Napindan Control were opened – as this would have deluged the already flooded rest of the low lying areas of Metro Manila eastward and brought more widespread loss of lives and damage to property along the Pasig River as floodwaters rushed towards Manila Bay.

Mother Nature has already cast her own vote in favor of the Parañaque Spillway – an orderly exhaust further southeast that was mothballed because of Cory Aquino's folly.

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Now that a monumental massacre has passed, we can of course return to our comfort zones after rescue, relief and rehabilitation. But at the rate the globe is warming up, the Biblical-like deluge is yet to come.

Meanwhile, as a nation wallows amidst the stench of its own decay, George Santayana warns those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

(To be continued . . .)

***E ditor's Notes:*** To read the earlier articles in this series, please click on these hyperlinks:

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[Metro Manila Chairman Killed Flood-warning System](#) (Part III)

[Restoring Rhyme and Reason Back to Metro Manila](#) (Part IV)

[Palafox's Tell All: Typhoon-caused Deaths and Destruction Were Not God's Acts but Were Results of Criminal Negligence](#) (Part V)

[Tony Abaya Calls Cory Aquino's Ring Dike Ridiculous and Presents Alternatives](#) (Part VI)

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