

BANTAY GOBYERNO

By Ike Señeres

I remember an old debate way back in my Diliman days, about who is really the prima donna of the social sciences, whether it is economics or political science. Of course I was on the political science side at that time, but when I graduated and moved on to the corporate world, I realized that it is really money that drives the politics of a developing nation.

It is the development aspect that makes the difference, because in politically mature societies, there is no doubt that it is politics that drives everything, including the economic aspects. To be precise, however, politics and economics of the same coin, given the fact that many politicians enter politics in order to protect and preserve their economic power.

Into this picture enters Art Valdez, the leader of the Philippine Mount Everest team, and the Balanghay Voyage team. An iconic leader with impeccable credentials and unquestionable credibility, he now says that what we need now is a new cultural revolution. He explains that way back in our early history, our territory was inhabited by a highly civilized, dignified and proud people, adding that we should recover and restore that pride in order to move forward as one united country.

Art cited the example of China, a country that was once devastated by war and humbled by national defeat and economic failure. He said that it was because of the cultural revolution of China that enabled the Chinese people to rediscover their national identity, and as a consequence they also restored their national pride, a factor that enabled them to move towards a clear path of progress.

In a manner of speaking, Art is in effect saying that culture is more important than economics and politics, suggesting indirectly that a new cultural revolution will give us the strength and the inspiration to move forward economically and politically. As it turned out, it now appears that the conquest of Mount Everest by Filipinos and the successful journey of the Balanghay boats are actually part of this emerging new Cultural Revolution.

Not the type who would stop while he is ahead, Art is now about to start an expanded Balanghay voyage that will take his team to more ports of call in the Philippines, in a sort of seaborne road show that will take five years to complete, a mission that could kindle and inspire the whole nation towards a new cultural revolution. True enough, Art told me that aside from the medical, dental missions that are being planned, the road show will also include the documentation of native and indigenous arts and cultures.

In our private conversations, Art told me that during the Mount Everest climbs and the Balanghay voyages, he and his teams realized the importance of disaster preparedness and

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emergency response readiness. Because of this realization, Art has now added disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) to his advocacies, saying as well that DRR and CCA seminars will always be part of the new voyage activities.

Art and I are fellow American Field Service (AFS) scholars. Another well known AFS scholar is Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga. Sharing a common bond, we have agreed to work together for the good of the nation, possibly also bringing in Tony into the joint efforts. We still have to work out the specifics, but the general idea is to build lasting institutions in all the ports of call where the boats will go.

Among other specific ideas, Art and I talked about establishing Command and Control Centers (CCC) in every region, similar to the CCC project in Makati that I supported as a computer consultant. A CCC is the nerve center of all police, fire, ambulance, rescue, hospital and traffic information and communications within a locality, and logically it should also be the base of all DRR and CCA operations.

We also talked about establishing a Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) branch in every region, also a Marine Biodiversity Center (MBDC) in each region. These are big and tall ideas, but are surely within the realistic reach of a true visionary who has proven himself in the achievement of near impossible goals. In so many ways, he believes that our natural diversity is part of our cultural heritage.

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As part of the MBDC project, Art has agreed to promote the replanting of mangrove trees in all the coastal areas where the boats will dock. Needless to say, this will include the Manila Bay, and this is where MABIADO will come in. To know more about it, visit <http://sedablog.blogspot.com/2011/04/manila-bay-integrated-area-development.html>

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