OPINION

THE KIDAPAWAN MASSACRE
By Angelo Lopez for the
April 13, 2016 Philippines Today

EDITORIAL

It’s too hot in the Philippines

Yes, it’s too hot in the Philippines nowadays. One of the reasons – the heated political cauldron that had caused the death of at least 45 persons, including candidates and supporters. Another reason is the El Nino which has destroyed some $9 billion of farm crops and triggered a hot-southern warm weather in most parts of the country. In fact, the heat index in Cabanatuan City in Nueva Ecija hit 51 degrees Celsius on April 11, just three degrees Celsius below the “extreme danger” level, within which heat stroke is imminent. Heat index was also high in Metro Manila, Pampanga, Zambales, Bohol, Cebu, among others.

As a result of the El Nino, Bohol and lately Cebu province were the latest provinces to declare a state of calamity as the government weather agency Pagasa predicted that more than 30 more provinces may experience severe drought this month and this could go on for a couple of months more. The same phenomenon battered areas in the Visayas and Mindanao, especially North Cotabato where farmers appealed for assistance through a rally which ended in a violent breakup by police in Kidapawan City. Prior to the Kidapawan incident, President Aquino and Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala have been under fire for not doing so much to ease the adverse effects of El Nino and help the farmers. Not only farms were affected. In Mindanao, blackouts lasting six to eight hours is a big problem and from the looks of it, Luzon maybe next to be hit by the power blackouts which, when not resolved in time, could affect the conduct of the May 9 elections.

Due to the extreme heat index, Pagasa has advised the public to stay indoors as much as possible, wear lightweight and colored clothing, drink plenty of water, avoid drinking liquor, eat small meals, and avoid eating foods high in protein. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), on the other hand, is set to issue an Oratio Imperata to ask for rains. CBCP President Archbishop Socrates Villegas said they are ready to urge priests to ask for rains through the prayer they will issue, adding they are optimistic that once they start praying, rains will fall. “Ulan (it will rain). Have faith in the power of prayer,” he said.

The Aquino government should wake up and do something decisive and immediately to cushion the country against the adverse impact of prolonged dry spell, drought and extreme heat as a result of El Nino otherwise more Filipinos will suffer in the coming months.

Story of Filipino vets should be in US schoolbooks

Cecilia Gaerlan, daughter of a World War II veteran, who takes every opportunity to remind this country of its debt of gratitude to the Philippine troops who enlisted with the United States Army in the Far East or the USAFFE.

Gaerlan leads commemoration of the occasion with a series of events in the San Francisco Bay Area. Gaerlan and her Bataan Legacy Historical Society coordinated with Robert McHugh and Memorare Manilla 1945 on Day of Valor or the 74th anniversary of the Fall of Bataan April 11 at the Philippine Consultative Garden.

An exhibit on WII in the Philippines will be on view at the consulate until April 29. Throughout the month, Caring for Our Heroes provider resource fairs will take place in Union City (April 16), Daly City and Vallejo (April 17), and Sacramento (April 18). Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba will be the guest speaker.

Gaerlan has an overarching objective to preserve the Filipino soldiers’ contribution for succeeding generations.

She is working to have certain facts memorialized in the curriculum of high schools in the Golden State. Initiated in 2014, the effort targets Grades 10 and 11 in “all school districts.”

“The more monumental task is in getting the history teachers to teach this,” she told this writer. “We are already starting the process of creating a curriculum template that will be historically accurate and will reflect the perspective of those who were in the Philippines during WII.”

Gaerlan also wants to correct some inaccuracies in the proposed text of the history curriculum regarding the Filipino solders actually served under the same command as the American soldiers - USAFFE as well as the “bigger significance” of the Battle of Bataan.

“Most books only know the Fall of Bataan as the largest single surrender in military history,” she said. “Despite suffering from massive sickness and starvation and fighting without any air support as a result of the Europe First Policy, the US-FFE troops performed a delaying action that disrupted the timetable of the Imperial Japanese Army of 52 days, defending Bataan for 99 days. They exceeded their mandate of performing a delaying action by 47 days when gave the Allied Forces the time to harness the resources that eventually led to their victory.”

Gaerlan’s effort parallels the advocacy for the Filipino farm worker leaders who united with Mexican workers and sparked the Grape Strike of 1965. Their tenacity gained the attention and support of influential people and led to the unionization of California farm labor, a fact now recorded and taught in state schools.

“Their story of sacrifice and heroism should be learned by each and every student here in the U.S. and even in the Philippines and Japan,” stressed Gaerlan. She takes pride in their “story of great sacrifice because majority of those who fought and died were Filipinos.

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Safeguarding the ballots

With only a few days before the May 9 elections, what appears to be a smooth preparation for the political exercise are being marred by reported cheating during the voting of overseas Filipinos in different polling places worldwide. Many frustrated voters took to the social media to express what they said as manipulated result, pointing out that while they voted for a certain candidate, their votes were counted by the machine in favour of another presidential candidate.

A watchdog of the Commission on Elections for several elections now, the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), on the other hand, put Comelec Chairman Andres Bautista to task as it expressed misgivings over his announcement of Comelec’s readiness in the elections. Bautista had confidently declared that he and his fellow commissioners are “more prepared” to hold the third automated national polls than the previous two exercises, in 2010 and 2013. But PPCRV chairperson Henrietta de Villa countered that saying she sees as a “deadly combination” to enforce changes in the election process, including replacing ballots and also Comelec’s lack of transparency on the deployment of vote count machines, election paraphernalia and other supplies to various regional poll hubs nationwide. De Villa also expressed fears that the 2016 Presidential election may be “edgy” over the numerous late-hour changes being implemented by the poll body like replacement of ballots and that failure of the Comelec to inform them of the entire preparation process, making their volunteers nationwide at bay.

De Villa also criticized the apparent lack of transparency in the deployment of the vote counting machines and other election paraphernalia. She noted that they were supposed to know the date and location of the deployment of the machines and other election paraphernalia. Even former Senator Richard Gordon, who authored the Automated Election Law, warned that several safeguards have not been instituted going into the elections, giving room to possible cheating.

Hopefully, enough measures will be undertaken by the Comelec given the PPCRV and Gordon’s appeal while there is time to ensure honest, orderly, peaceful and transparent election. Otherwise, the election results will be tainted and this may yet divide further the nation. If the authorities have not yet done their homework, we call on them to roll up their sleeves and work now. It’s better late than never, after all.
Spat with journalists

After drawing flak for statements and comments on various subjects affecting the country during his press conferences and interviews, President-elect Rodrigo Duterte dared the media to stop covering him. At the same time, Mr. Duterte declared a self-imposed ban on press interviews on him all throughout his six-year term in Malacanang.

Mr. Duterte's latest spat with the media was his statement that journalists are not angels and all heroes and, in fact, many in their rank are corrupt and are maimed, charged or killed because of such corruption, mishandling of their reportage and biases. Mr. Duterte's spokesmen readily defended the President-elect, pointing out that he was merely misquoted and misunderstood because of his unorthodox ways. In fact, they said that Mr. Duterte fully respects journalists and their important role of keeping the people well informed and exposing corruption and malpractices in government and was not supporting the killing of journalists. As a show of proof, Mr. Duterte appointed as his media head one of their rank, Martin Andanar, a working broadcaster and journalist who hails from Mindanao.

But the Philippine Press Institute, the country's national association of newspapers, was not satisfied with the media handlers of Mr. Duterte and instead appealed to the President-elect to commit himself to the protection of journalists and uphold the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press.

"The incoming president's disturbing remarks do nothing to counter the spate of media attacks in the country. On the contrary, they tend to foster the brazen sense of impunity behind the alarming rise of journalist deaths in the Philippines," the organization added.

Unabated media killings in the country has earned it a reputation as the second most dangerous country for journalists, next only to war-torn Iraq. During the term of President Aquino alone, more than 30 media workers have been murdered and the killers have remained scot free and unpunished.

While no one denies the existence of corruption within media, this cannot be used a justification for murdering or attacking journalists. There should transparency in government and how officials behave. Only the media can make that happen and so it should continue with this role that earned the press as the "Fourth Estate."
Simple inauguration for Duterte, Robredo

At noon this June 30, President Rodrigo Duterte assumes as the country’s 16th Chief Executive after sending off outgoing President Benigno S. Aquino III and his inauguration that follows in Malacanang.

As announced, the inauguration will be simple with only over 600 guests and with simple food to be served to the local and foreign guests in keeping with the wishes of Mr. Duterte fo a simple celebration, according to inaugural committee member Lisette Marques. “Iyong ating mga iis-serve sa ating mga bisita basically finger food, meron tayong lumpia, monggo in cups. Meron tayong cheese, keso puti in pandesal. Iyong iyong mga simpiking bagay na ilalagay natin to also answer to his wishes,” Marques said.

True to his promise of change, Duterte also specified adobo, durian and maruya (banana fritters) for inclusion in the menu for his inauguration as the country’s 16th president. And instead of wine, guests will be served coconut juice.

Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo will have a separate inauguration at the Quezon City Reception House. According to her spokesperson Georgina Hernandez, buchi, sotanghon, pandesal, maja blanca, pichi-pichi and Robredo’s favorite, choc-nut will be served during the said event at the Quezon City Reception House.

Dispensing with highly paid couturiers and stylists, Duterte will wear a barong Tagalog made in his home turf and cordonoy slacks during his inauguration at Malacañang’s Rizal Hall. The event will be aired live via the government channel and Facebook.

We congratulate President Duterte for keeping true to his words and promise for change. Our felicitation also goes to Vice President Leni and all elected officials who all will assume their posts at the same time. We wish you all success for the good of our beloved country, the Philippines.

Harder fight for DACA, DAPA Statement by Filipino Advocates for Justice

This week Upside is giving space to Filipino Advocates for Justice on an issue that affects Filipinos and all other immigrant communities, especially those of color. Following is the statement issued by the Oakland-based organization on the recent United States Supreme Court deadlock on the legality of President Obama's 2014 executive orders shielding undocumented children brought into this country as minors and undocumented parents of U.S.-born children. Those orders were challenged by 26 states in a Texas District Court and elevated to the Supreme Court.

FILIPINO Advocates for Justice is angered and saddened - but not defeated - by the Supreme Court's split decision (4-4) in the case of United States v. Texas. This decision blocks the implementation of President Obama's humanitarian efforts to expand DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and provide relief from deportation for parents of American citizens and legal permanent residents through a program called DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans). The decision means that DACA expansion and DAPA are still on hold. The case will now be sent back to the Texas district court to determine whether the programs are constitutional. The original DACA program, launched in 2012, is still available and is NOT affected by the Supreme Court's decision.

"This decision hurts because we fought hard to protect young people and families from deportation. But we are warriors. We will organize harder, raise our voices louder, and come together even stronger than before. This includes getting out the vote for leaders who will fight for the rights of immigrant communities," said Beatrice Sanchez, a DACA recipient.

"This decision does not change the existing DACA program," says Rachel Acerobe, FAJ Immigration Counselor. "Eligible undocumented immigrants should continue to apply for and renew DACA in order to access its many benefits. For those who are DACA eligible, don't be discouraged. The more young people access DACA, the clearer it is that relief from deportation is needed and that we need a real legalization program."

While this decision is a temporary setback, immigrant communities, our allies, and others committed to human rights will double our efforts to push for immigration policies that uphold the dignity of immigrants. This is a call to action for the new American majority to use our vote this November to remove immigrant-hating legislators -- particularly Governors - and replace them with public officials who recognize the contributions of and embrace immigrant communities.

In this light, we applaud the more rational direction of the California State Legislature who, just yesterday, passed the Dignity Not Detention Act (SB 1289). SB 1289 prohibits municipalities from contracting with for-profit immigration detention companies (like GEO Group and CCA), requires all detention facilities in California to uphold humane standards, and allows immigrants to sue if their rights are violated.

Beyond the elections, FAJ will continue to fight for the protection and expansion of immigrants' rights including fair and humane legalization of the undocumented.

Filipino Advocates for Justice (FAJ), a nonprofit based in Alameda County, Calif., is a 43-year-old service, community organizing and social justice organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. Its mission is to build a strong and empowered Filipino community by organizing constituents, developing leaders, providing services, and advocating for policies that promote social and economic justice and equity. More information visit www.filipinos4justice.org or call 310-465-9876.
Trump crackdown on immigrants

From the looks of it, the administration of US President-elect Donald Trump is ominous for millions of Filipinos and Filipino Americans in America and in the Philippines. This as Mr. Trump appears firm on his campaign promise to crack down on illegal immigrants and his initial pronouncement indicated that some 3 million of them will be the first target of his campaign.

There are some 300,000 undocumented Filipinos in the US and some estimates the number could be as high as 500,000 and the Trump crackdown could target them. This, therefore, is a concern of their countrymen in America as well as their thousands of relatives back home.

Already, the Philippines is in jitters as fears on the back-lash of a Trump administration has already affected trading in the stock market and the exchange rate of the peso to the dollar. As of press time, the peso breached the P49 mark vs the US dollar, the lowest since 2009 and trading was down. At the same time, the business outsourcing industry, more popularly known as the call centers, has expressed of a possible adverse effects as Mr. Trump wants more Americans to get the work that are now outsourced to the Philippines, India, China and other countries.

Philippine officials like President Rodrigo Duterte, however, appear to be unperturbed by the developments in America where anti-Trump protests have continued even as the mayors of major cities like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago are standing firm on their laws that established their cities as sanctuaries of immigrants, which is in stark contrast to Mr. Trump's plans.

The prospects for the future are really not clear as Mr. Trump will still assume as president on January 20, 2017 and at this time is still marshalling the best talent for his Cabinet and leaders that would help him shape the plans for the four years that he will be in the White House. In the meantime, we should wait and hope for the best to come.