

Front News

Philippines braces for May 9 polls: who are the contenders?

By: Gina Villanueva, Associate Editor

The Philippines' general elections on May 9 promises to be yet another exciting exercise in suffrage. Contenders include:

Manuel "Mar" Roxas, leader of the ruling Liberal Party (LP), son of a senator and the grandson of a president, Roxas was a senator and congressman before serving in the cabinet of incumbent President Benigno Aquino. He is seen as one of the few candidates with deep knowledge of economics, and is dubbed as "Mr. Palengke," (Mr. Market). He is credited with economic successes, such as bringing the "call-center" industry to the Philippines. He is known to appeal to the "elite" as is Aquino.

Jejomar "Jojo" Binay was Vice-President in the Aquino cabinet until he resigned last June, and is seen by some as the opposite of Roxas. He founded his own political party, the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA); has come under sustained criticism for alleged corruption during his term as Mayor of Makati City - the country's answer to Wall Street (economic hub of the country). Yet despite the vast sums of money that he inexplicably gained while in public service, he presents himself as a man of the people - a populist, who cares for the poor, using his long track record of strong social services as a long-serving Mayor. He is against the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). He is also more amenable on a bilateral stance on the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines, which is favorable to Beijing.

Grace Poe, a Senator, is running as an independent, a rookie, just in for three years in politics, with her citizenship qualification still under deliberation, being that she was adopted by the late actor and politician Fernando Poe Jr and wife, the actress Susan Roces. She flip-flopped between American and Filipino citizenship. She has a mixed message in her platform, of caring for the poor, on the one hand, but has considerable support from the elite (big business and intellectuals), on the other. According to the most recent survey by Laylo Research Strategies, she maintains her lead in opinion polls by 29 percent.

Rodrigo Duterte, long-serving Davao City Mayor, is a member of the PDP-Laban Party, who is seen by analysts as a wild card, running mostly on a tough law-and-order platform. His major policy platform is to turn the Philippines into a federal state to counter the ill effects of centuries of over-centralized administration.

Miriam Defensor Santiago of the People's Reform Party almost won the presidency in 1992. She has served in all three branches of the Philippine government - judicial, executive, and legislative. She was once named one of the 100 most powerful women in the world by The Australian magazine. She is running for the third time as a legitimate candidate, on her reputation as a brilliant and fearless mind, albeit languishing in surveys in the single digits. She was ill with cancer, but insists she has fully recovered.

In the final analysis, Filipinos will have to decide voting on the key factors between reformism and populism.

Meanwhile, as it was, and still is, Filipinos see the government's anti-corruption efforts as insufficient. Traffic in urban areas, illegal drugs and crime remain major concerns, and economic growth has not translated into more jobs at home, with only the top five percent of the population benefiting from it, say analysts.

Seneres: champion of Filipino migrant workers, dies; 68

Rep. Roy Seneres Sr., former chair of the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) and former ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), under Philippines President Fidel Ramos, died on February 8, after a prolonged bout of diabetes, his son, Hans Christian Seneres said. He was 68. He died of cardiopulmonary arrest at St. Luke's Medical Center in Taguig City, three days after withdrawing from the presidential race. He left behind his wife and six children, and will be interred at Manila Memorial Park in Paranaque City.

Seneres, who spent his first term in Congress advocating the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFW) families, career diplomats, poor workers and government employees, announced his candidacy in October, as the standard-bearer of Partido ng Manggagawa at Magsasaka.

His platform centered on labor, migrant rights, and inclusive growth.

COAST GUARD AUXILIARY NCR-CL HOLDS CONFAB

PCGA-PIO: The Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary (PCGA)'s prime district, the Coast Guard Auxiliary District National Capital Region-Central Luzon (CGADNCR-CL), has successfully conducted its District Conference (DISCON) last February 05-06 2016 at the Asian Institute for Maritime Studies (AIMS), Pasay.

The annual event aims to gather the officers and auxiliaries of CGADNCR-CL for the district-wide dissemination and refresher seminars on their main functions in support of the missions of the Philippine Coast Guard. This includes the reorientation on functional commands such as Maritime Safety (MARSAF), Maritime Search and Rescue (MARSAR), Marine Environmental Protection (MAREP), Maritime Community Relations (MCOMREL) and Protocol.

The DISCON was graced by Philippine Coast Guard-NCR Commander, Commodore Athelo L Ybañez; Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary National Director, Vice Admiral Valentin B Prieto Jr.; and CGADNCR-CL Director Commodore Salvador G. Tiangco Jr.

New members and newly promoted officers were likewise be taking their oath and donning of shoulder boards on the first day.

Meanwhile, a Maritime Search and Rescue Simulation Drill was conducted on February 06, 2016 in Seaside Beach Resort, Naic, Cavite. This was hosted by the 103rd and 125th Auxiliary Squadrons that are operating in the area of responsibility of Cavite.

The MARSAR Simulation Drill aims to present the actual scenarios of maritime incidents and how a PCGA member can prepare and effectively respond at the fastest possible time. This also exhibits the organized planning, well-coordinated actions with other governmental institutions and capability enhancement of the participating groups.

The PCG Auxiliary is the uniformed civilian counterpart of the Philippine Coast Guard, assisting the latter in areas of maritime safety, maritime search and rescue, marine environmental protection and maritime community relations.

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NEWS AT A GLANCE

Divorce is possible in the Philippines, after all.

In a unanimous ruling, the Supreme Court has upheld the divorce of a Muslim man and a Roman Catholic woman over “irreconcilable religious differences,” affirming the practice called talaq, or divorce, under the Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines, which is based on the Sharia, or Islamic law.(Inquirer)

Court junks Trillanes’ motion to suspend libel case proceedings

A Makati City court junked yesterday the motion of Senator Antonio Trillanes IV to suspend the court proceedings on the libel case filed against him by suspended Makati City mayor Erwin “Jun-Jun” Binay. Judge Dina Teves, of the Makati City Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 142, also denied Trillanes’ motions to suspend the service of the arrest warrant issued on February 1. The court said it found probable cause on the case filed against the senator.

Duterte introduces partner to media

In a rare appearance, presidential aspirant and Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte introduced his partner, Cielito "Honeylet" Avancena, a nurse.. Duterte is currently living with his common law wife, Honeylet. tThe couple has an 11-year old daughter named Veronica. Duterre was once married to Elizabeth Abellana Zimmerman, an American-German descent, a flight attendant. They have 3 children, Paolo and Sarah ventured into politics while Sebastian engaged himself into business.

Anti-political dynasty bill dead

House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. declared Wednesday, February 3, that the proposal seeking to end political dynasties is dead in the 16th Congress. The House chief admitted that the Lower Chamber will not be able to pass the measure before Congress adjourns today Thursday, February 4 to pave way for the national election campaign which starts next week.

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DIFFICULT TIMES

Angel Locsin says she and Luis Manzano are still together, but admits they are going through something difficult in their relationship. Screenshot from Instagram/@luckymanzano

MANILA, Philippines – Following rumors that they had broken up, actress Angel Locsin clarified on Friday, January 29 that she and Luis Manzano are still together. Angel spoke up in an interview on Tonight with Boy Abunda.

"Hindi pa po (We haven't broken up yet)," Angel answered when asked if they had parted. "May pinagdadaan lang po kami. Pero inaayos naman po namin (We're just going through something. But we're fixing it)," she added trying to keep herself from getting emotional.

When asked where she's getting her strength during these difficult times, Angel said: "Sa lahat ng taong nagmamahal sa akin. Kahit kay Luis, humuhugot pa rin naman ako sa kanya. Hindi pa rin naman nawawala yung – kahit may problema kami, nandiyan pa din yung pagmamahal, Tito Boy. May mga kailangan lang kaming ayusin and I'm hoping maging maayos."

(From the people who love me. Even from Luis, I still get my strength from him. That doesn't go away even if we are going through a problem, that love is still there. We just need to fix something, and I'm hoping it will be fixed.)

Angel apologized for not being able to talk about it further, saying it might just do more harm to their relationship.

In a report on Bandila Wednesday, January 27, Luis confirmed that he and Angel were going through something in their relationship and were trying to iron it out.

Luis and Angel dated back in 2007 but broke up after two years. In 2014, they renewed their relationship after Angel appeared on Luis' show Minute to Win It.

Both are currently working as part of Pilipinas Got Talent, where Luis is a host and Angel is a judge. (Rappler) READ: 'PGT' judge Angel Locsin touched as fans chant 'Darna'

SPORTS

Timothy Bradley Jr. vacates WBO welterweight title

Timothy Bradley Jr. has just relinquished his WBO welterweight world title as he will be unable to make his mandatory title defense against Sadam Ali. Bradley had been obligated to defend the belt against Ali but instead opted to face Manny Pacquiao in a third installment, which is obviously a much higher profile fight for bigger money.

In a letter from Bradley written to WBO president Paco Valcarcel, Bradley stated:

"As you know I will be fighting Manny Pacquiao on April 9, 2016 in Las Vegas, NV," Bradley wrote. "To accept this fight invariably means I cannot comply with my mandatory obligation and must forgo the mandatory against Sadam Ali, as ordered by the WBO. This is a difficult decision, but one I have to make to give fans the best fights as well as allow myself the toughest and biggest fights possible from both a competitive and financial perspective."

Valcarcel acknowledged Bradley's decision and responded by saying:

"Do know that we wholly understand your decision and commend you for always giving fans the best fights possible and doing what is best for your career at this important juncture," Valcarcel wrote. "You have been an outstanding, honorable and loyal WBO junior welterweight and welterweight champion of the world and the doors of the WBO will always be open for you."

Valcarcel also let Bradley know that the WBO would be preparing a "special recognition" for the winner of Pacquiao-Bradley III (a specially designed belt perhaps?).

Sadam Ali (22-0, 13 KOs) will now be facing Jessie Vargas (26-1, 9 KOs) for the vacant title on March 5th on HBO, on the undercard of Luis Ortiz-(Tony Thompson)

Tourism

The Completion of Mindoro's Circumferential Road to Boost Tourism and Economy of the Two Provinces

By Randy V. Urlanda, Manila Bureau Chief Correspondent

It has been every Mindoreno's dream to travel by land around their island up north without transferring to a flimsy motorized outrigger and sail through a maelstrom to the other side of the island to complete their journey. The southern part of the 516-kilometer circumferential road where a 37-km gap between the coal-rich town of Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro and the bustling town of San Jose in Occidental Mindoro, was linked together in 2012.

Calapan City, the economic hub of Oriental Mindoro on the island's east coast is very accessible from the Batangas Port in the Luzon mainland 25 nautical miles away via Japanese roll-on roll-off ferries, swift Australian-designed catamaran passenger vessels with 'airline' amenities, and hulking jumbo motorized outriggers that sails across the busy Verde Passage in just one-and-a-half hours. The distant province of Occidental Mindoro on the west coast, on the other hand, has limited access from Batangas, using mostly old, lumbering Japanese ro-ro ferries for the three-hour voyage to the port of Abra de Ilog, its northern marine gateway.

So, it was a moment for rejoicing for the islanders when the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) announced recently that the remaining 20.33 kilometers of road carved out of the slopes of Mount Talipanan, along the craggy northern coast, would finally connect the entire 516-kilometer circumferential road. The P1.93-billion road project, which started in the resort town of Puerto Galera on the northernmost tip of Oriental Mindoro and would end at the rice and corn-rich municipality of Abra de Ilog in Occidental Mindoro, would be completed soon.

The 23-kilometer project was approved by then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo way but was temporarily suspended after opposition from a local town executive for undisclosed reason. However, a presidential order finally settled the problem and construction resumed with finality.

"The completion this year of the Mindoro Island Circumferential Road (MICR), the second and final of the interconnection of the two Mindoro provinces will boost the island's economic and tourism activities," exclaims Rockey D. Ilagan, barangay chairman of Sabang, one of Puerto Galera's barangays famous for its dive sites.

"The opening of the mountainous (northern) provincial border is greatly beneficial to the provinces of Mindoro in terms of the further development of the tourism industry and the handling of goods and services," says Ilagan, a sea transport and resort hotel owner in the popular resort town which has some of the most diverse coral reef diving in Asia.

When the final road gap has been linked, foreign and local tourists who have stayed for several days in the picturesque resort town of Puerto Galera, the pioneer in the so-called "backyard tourism" in the country long before Boracay became a household name among foreign beachcombers in the early 1970s, now can board an air-conditioned mini-van bound for Sablayan town on the west coast to dive and explore at its 24-square-kilometer wide Apo Reef Nature Park or experience the thrill of a lifetime by riding Sablayan's 1.5-km motorized zip line that crosses the ocean and ends up on an island resort, a first of its kind in the world.

In the mid-1970s, Puerto Galera form part of the two major destinations in the Philippines of the so-called "golden triangle," a much-traveled route of mostly European backpackers in Southeast Asia. The "triangle" starts in the historic city of Chiang Mai in the highlands of northern Thailand to sunny Puerto Galera in Mindoro, then to the lofty, pine-clad Sagada, the mountain resort town in the Mountain Province in the Cordillera renowned for its alpine climate, caves and "hanging coffins." The triangle ends down on the island resort of Bali in Indonesia.

At present, tourists and plain travelers alike take a perilous boat ride for more than an hour from here to the port of Abra de Ilog, the gateway to Occidental Mindoro," says veteran newsman Robert Evora, a correspondent of the Manila Standard during the road's launching ceremony in Puerto Galera two weeks ago. "From the port they continue their journey by land for three hours to Sablayan."

Evora also explained that the completion of the circumferential road has been "much awaited" since Puerto Galera, which is listed by the "Club of the Most Beautiful Bays in the World" as the most scenic in its short list, will benefit from it since its two seaports will cater to ro-ro ferries loaded with vital agricultural products and services to Western Mindoro. At the moment, traders and residents use the southern road to Occidental Mindoro to move goods and services, and vice versa.

Occidental Mindoro supplies rice, corn, tobacco, garlic, onions, cassava, tuna, and sea salt to other parts of the country. The island's economy in general is largely based on agriculture and considered as the "rice granary" of the Southern Tagalog Region that supplies rice to Metro Manila. Now, the placid Mindoro Strait facing the west coast has been tagged as the new "tuna highway," where prime yellow fin tuna caught by artisanal fishermen in Mamburao and Sablayan are exported to the European Union.

From Calapan City, one can drive to the other side to Mamburao, the tuna-rich provincial capital of Occidental Mindoro in an arduous NINE HOURS of land travel via the southern route. With the new road, it would only take less than THREE HOURS to traverse comfortably to either provincial capital.

Now, residents of the laid back capital of Mamburao, where there is not even a single fast-food restaurant, a decent diner, a triple-AAA beach resort hotel, a shopping mall or exciting night life to speak of, are gearing up for the wave of investors and speculators once the new road is opened. These moneyed businessmen would like to be the first to strike bulao, the Mangyan term for "gold" where the town's name was derived (may bulao- "there's gold") and mine its natural riches that have practically remained untapped up to now. Will the opening of the new road be a boon or a bane to Mamburao? It would surely be a boon not only to Occidental Mindoro but, to the entire island as well.

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Bernie Sanders just made a very big promise on immigration

During the Democratic debate between former first lady, secretary of state Hillary and senator Hillary Clinton and Sen. Bernie Sanders (Ind. Vermont), Thursday night, Feb 11, 2016, the debate between the two Democratic presidential bets got into an extended scuffle on immigration after he whacked her for supposedly wanting to send back the children who recently dominated the news after migrating unaccompanied from Central America. She denied this charge, pointing out that she wanted due process for them here, while also noting that full amnesty for them risked sending a message that might encourage others to send children on the dangerous journey northward.

But perhaps the most notable moment of the exchange was this from Sanders:

"We've got 11 million undocumented people in this country. I have talked to some of the young kids with tears rolling down their cheeks, are scared to death that today they may or their parents may be deported.

"I believe that we have got to pass comprehensive immigration reform, something that I strongly supported. I believe that we have got to move toward a path toward citizenship. I agree with President Obama who used executive orders to protect families because the Congress, the House was unable or refused to act. And in fact I would go further....

"Somebody who is very fond of the president, agrees with him most of the time, I disagree with his recent deportation policies. And I would not support those. Bottom line is a path towards citizenship for 11 million undocumented people, if Congress doesn't do the right thing, we use the executive orders of the president."

This seems to come close to a promise to use executive action to defer the deportation of all of the undocumented immigrants who would be legalized under the legislative proposals Democrats have championed. (The Senate comprehensive immigration bill aspires to place 11 million on a path to legalization, but in practice would lead to legalization for closer to nine million people, by some estimates.) And indeed, this is what immigration advocates think they heard Sanders say last night.

"He seems to be promising deportation relief for some nine million undocumented immigrants through executive action," Frank Sharry of America's Voice tells me.

In saying this, Sanders confirms that he believes the president has significantly more executive authority to grant deportation relief than President Obama believes he has. Obama's most recent executive action — which is being legally challenged by two dozen states and will come before the Supreme Court this spring — seeks to defer the deportations of some five million people who

are the parents of children who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents. But the administration deliberately excluded parents of DREAMers — people who were brought here illegally as children — because administration lawyers thought going that far would be legally questionable.

Asked for clarification of his position, the Sanders campaign pointed to his previously released immigration plan, in which he vows to expand the President's executive actions to cover as many as nine million people. Sanders's quote yesterday is consistent with that.

However, Sanders's deportation relief promise is newly relevant now. There is a renewed focus on the immigration issue, now that the Democratic primaries are heading to states with more diverse populations, such as Nevada, which has a large Latino population.

The Vermont senator would go significantly farther in using executive authority to grant deportation relief than Obama has tried to do — Sanders would extend it to granting relief to the parents of DREAMers and others. The Sanders campaign points to a letter signed by legal experts that argues the executive has very broad authority to defer deportations as an exercise of prosecutorial discretion.

However, Clinton has not gone as far as Sanders has in claiming such authority. While Clinton has said she will go farther than Obama will in using executive action, she has remained generally within the legal parameters the administration laid out for its own executive actions. Clinton has vowed to create new administrative processes to make it easier for the parents of DREAMers to apply for deferred action on a case-by-case basis. She has not said she thinks the next president should exercise the executive authority to expand Obama's actions to cover them as a group, as Sanders is suggesting.

And so, we'll now have a debate over the proper limits of executive authority in dealing with the undocumented population. Even if a Democrat is elected president, the House is all but certain to remain in GOP hands, which means there is a decent chance there won't be any legislative reform anytime soon. So the debate over executive authority — how much flexibility the executive has in dealing with the 11 million — is not merely an academic one. This debate is flaring up in other ways: As Seung Min Kim recently reported, Sanders is escalating his criticism of an Obama administration enforcement program that, to critics, represents Obama's misuse of executive authority to deal with the undocumented population.

"Now that it is clear Congress is broken for the foreseeable future, it is vital for candidates to stake out and vet their positions on executive action reforms," Chris Newman, the Legal Director at the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, tells me.

The question of how much flexibility the executive has in dealing with the undocumented population is a real, concrete question, and Sanders's vow to go significantly farther than Obama has is a real, concrete promise.