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VOL. 12 NO.8

Government Bids Out South Line Project

The government is inclined to award the P171 billion South Line of the North-South Railway Project (NSRP) within the first-half of 2016. The project would be the biggest under the Public-Private Partnership Program advanced by the Aquino administration.

According to the (DOTC) Department of Transport and Communications, the

issuance of the notice of award to the winning bidder of the project would be on April 27, 2016. The submission of the qualifying documents for the project is on Oct. 15 this year, while the date for the submission of bids will be on March 28 next year.

The project will have a two-stage bidding process wherein bidders have

to be pre-qualified, primarily based on the minimum legal, technical and financial requirements set by the DOTC and Philippine National Railways. Only those who pre-qualify shall be invited to submit technical and financial scoped in the second phase.

The NSRP involves the design and construction of the 56-kilometer



commuter rail from Tutuban in Manila to Calamba City in Laguna, and also the the 478-km long-haul rail service from Tutuban to Legazpi in Albay.

The long-haul service will have the following possible extensions: 58-km from Calamba, Laguna to Batangas City; and 117-km from Legazpi, Albay to Matnog, Sorsogon.

Currently, it is the (PNR) Philippine National Railways that is operating commuter service from Tutuban to Calamba, serving around 75,000 commuters daily.

Besides the construction, the winning bidder will also be in charge of the operations and maintenance of the entire NSRP South Line.



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Congressman Wants To Know Where Yolanda Rehab Fund Went

Leyte Rep. Ferdinand Martin Romualdez is asking Malacañang, "Where's the P90 billion in Yolanda rehabilitation funds?", after the Palace claimed that it released a total of P90 billion as of June 30 for the rehabilitation of areas destroyed by Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013.

more accurate, but then he was relieved of his duty after doing so.

While seemingly frustrated, Congressman Romualdez renewed his appeal to the Aquino government to set aside politicking and hasten the rebuilding of Yolanda-hit areas, emphasizing that



"I hope they can really show me – more importantly the victims and the hundreds of thousands who remain homeless and their farms and other properties destroyed – where that P90 billion is," said Romualdez who is the leader of the independent bloc in the House of Representatives.

"The bulk of the rehabilitation of the areas devastated by Yolanda are done by non-governmental organizations and foreign institutions, and many of them tell me that the government has not coordinated with them," the congressman added.

Yolanda devastated the Visayas region and some parts of Luzon in November 2013, killing at least 6,300 people and leaving thousands still missing. The Aquino administration has yet to confirm the total number of casualties. President Aquino insisted that only 2,500 could have been killed. Meanwhile, the police chief for Eastern Visayas, who told media of his estimate of 10,000 casualties, seemed

there should be "justness and fairness" in the release and equal distribution of public funds.

"There should be no selective release of funds. Equal allocation to help the Yolanda-hit areas must be exercised regardless of political color of local leaders," Romualdez said.

Earlier, former Yolanda rehabilitation chief Panfilo Lacson said he had asked Budget Secretary Florencio Abad to be ready to release P80 billion this year for the Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program (CRRP), but the latter claimed he still has to find ways to raise the amount.

According to Lacson, he informed Abad that he found P350 billion in savings in the 2014 budget, which was carried over to this year. But to his surprise, Abad did not put the P80 billion for the CRRP in this year's budget.

EDITOR THINKS

No Trapos Please



Politicians announcing their candidacies; printing presses getting busy with campaign materials; infrastructure projects going full-swing; and political alliances forming ever more sharply—it's still a year away, but the signs, visible everywhere, are sending one unmistakable message: the presidential election nears. About this, however, "So what?" seems to be

the general attitude unfolding from a jaded electorate that's also grown weary and dizzy amid government-perpetrated acts of plunder, economic sabotage, treason, deception, injustice, and across-the-board anarchy.

The widespread disinterest becomes all the more justifiable considering none of the concerns in the past presidential elections were ever addressed, even as it was conducted so chaotically and so vaguely that it may as well be deemed fraudulent or, at the least, a huge failure. Many even think that the 2010 elections was rigged. If there is truth in this, certainly more people wouldn't want to be a part of another Smartmatic-conducted farce, than there are who desire to. Any moral citizen would understandably refrain from lending additional credence to a sham that's purported to make corrupt and treasonous individuals remain in power. And any one who comes out as the ultimate winner of such a phony election can perhaps even be rightfully suspected of playing a major part, or of even being the prime instigator of the fraud.

A Straight Path that's Crooked from the Start

Noynoy Aquino won the dubiously engineered 2010 presidential elections. And after all that has transpired in the course of his administration, it's coming out as insanely perplexing that five years ago, as president elect, his immediate impulse was to assail his predecessor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, for what appears to be the same faults his government has today. He kept on charging at Arroyo for allowing corruption to go rampant and for defrauding the public with a rigged elections. Meanwhile, he started to feed everybody this cock and bull story about "Tuwid na Daan", his so-called straight path to good governance.

The recent years generally showed how Aquino's presidency was more of a puzzle—from the get-go up to the endorsement of his successor—instead of being a solution to the societal ills he vociferously condemned. He basically spent the most part of his term being a paradox to a people whom he promised truth, transparency, equality and justice. There's simply no denying how the Filipino still wallow in the grip of deception, confusion, inequality and injustice as before. A lot of critics claim the situation is even worse now.

Nicknamed "P-Noy" (for President Noynoy) to somewhat suggest that he is for the Pinoys, Aquino, encountered this initial conundrum which he ignored to his own undoing. He promised the country that he would rid our society of the corrupt and evil practices of traditional politicians (*trapos*), when in fact he himself is one. P-Noy is a true blue *trapo*, yet he trickily made people believe that he epitomizes the new breed of leaders that Filipinos need in order to progress. And there are few faster ways for a politician to lose popularity than to be caught lying to the public.

It's almost delusional how P-Noy flatters himself in urging Filipinos to vote for whoever he would endorse "for the sake of the continuance of his 'Tuwid na Daan' programs". For while he does this, a public that's already feeling so deceived by him looks back, in agony and confusion, thinking, if that's a straight path, then it's the most crooked straight path we've ever seen.

As revealed in the scandals about the hypocritical PDAF (Priority Development Assistance Fund) and the unconstitutional DAP (Disbursement Acceleration Program), the kleptocracy that has been going on during Noynoy Aquino's watch is so rampant and across-the-board that his righteous resolve quickly turned into a bewildered inaction when the scandals exploded in his face. From questions fired but unsatisfactorily answered, if he knew Janet Lim from before and how well... coupled with the Palace's mysterious special treatment of Lim, as in her terms of arrest, investigation and imprisonment... way up to what seemed like blundered cover-ups and whitewash activity that was going on behind the scenes, what dastardly notions that arose, the very vivid foot-in-mouth embarrassment that encompassed the government, and the betrayal that proceeded to incense the public who trusted P-Noy—all these instantly drew a picture of a reality that was the adverse opposite of the fable "straight path" he kept on talking about. On top of this, with only four individuals apprehended out of scores of names tagged in the Pork Scam by witnesses, and as the dozens more who were involved in the DAP controversy but then still walk free, seemingly insulated from scandal and prosecution—his *wang-wang* rhetoric, which painted him to be just and impartial, went parenthetically out the window.

The fact, however, that highly questionable lump sum disbursements continue to this day, in some morphed form premised on linear expenses of various departments in the bureaucracy—despite public indignation and contrary rulings by the Supreme Court—spells it all out clear-cut. P-Noy is his own boss, as opposed to what he had claimed in Day 1 which was us...the public. So, it's really all just crap, and thus allows us to easily define him now as a *trapo*, because if there is one consistent thing about *trapos*, it's the actuality that they are pathological liars.

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A Tradition of Pulling the Public's Leg

Why did the Pork Barrel scandal come into the open by way of Benhur Luy, an abused and maltreated participant of the scam who decided to blow the whistle after he had felt there was already a threat to his life? Were all the government agencies under "Tuwid na Daan" clueless of such a huge robbery of the people's money? Not the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation), not anyone from the Senate or Congress, not the COA (Commission On Audit), not any of the AMLA (Anti-Money Laundering Act)-compliant banks, not the Ombudsman, not the BIR (Bureau of Internal Revenue) and its power to do lifestyle checks, not the DBM (Department of Budget and Management), not the Department of Justice (DOJ), not any magistrate from the Supreme Court, had any knowledge of the scam, as noone, as in not anyone of the agency heads and esteemed institutions of government—raise any concern about the possibility of loopholes in the law which could be abused by scammers, or any suspicion that a scam was being so blatantly perpetrated against taxpayers—until the Philippine Daily Inquirer published a six-part exposé...on the reasons behind Benhur Luy's illegal detention by Janet Lim.

Especially not aware of the huge on-going scam was P-Noy, according to a band of flop-sweating and fidgety Presidential spokespersons. In fact, he didn't even know where to stand when he learned of it, as he first expressed that nothing was wrong and therefore there was no scam, until the next day when he started to condemn it and promised the people justice, and up to months later when, after he had condemned it, still pled on the other hand to the Supreme Court to allow the release of the funds which, at the height of the controversy, were effectively placed under a TRO (Temporary Restraining Order) pending oral arguments on filed petitions in relation to lump sum funds in general. And this flaky, nonsensical and vascillating resolve has become something all too familiar about the Aquino administration.

President Aquino is called "B.S." by his critics because he is often caught contradicting himself, perhaps as often as he finds his foot in his mouth. But even if it imperils his credibility, as it frequently causes people to surmise he is insincere, many believe this particular manner of his, which he practically ignores all to adhere to, will never change for the better. For as he tries to appear more honest and sincere, without really letting the cat out of the bag; as he eloquently delivers an encouraging SONA (State-Of the-Nation-Address), without prioritizing the passing of the critically needed FOI (Freedom Of Information) Act; and as he boasts of a moral government, without putting a stop to corruption-prone lump sum disbursement schemes or ensuring the prosecution and punishment of all, and not just the opposition party members, who are guilty of plunder and graft—he will only be attempting to be a better liar. No different from his habit of feigning a glorious performance and a great economy in the face of China's occupation of our shoals and the worsening poverty situation, or like the way he praises and congratulates his cabinet and appointed department heads for their quick response to emergencies and efficient rehabilitation work after disasters even with the denizens of Tacloban still currently waiting for relief goods and services from government two years after Yolanda, it's a style that defines him unmistakably as a traditionalist, one which he will never abandon.

Perhaps as traditional as the most traditional of *trapos*, P-Noy, unfortunately, will likely be employing for the remainder of his term, not the new and "straight" ways of governance that we were duped with, but the old "crooked" ways, ways that were designed to subdue, govern and exploit an entire nation of Filipinos, ways used back in the days...when Filipinos were mostly dumb and illiterate *indios*. And it's actually just too bad for him that it is his very obsession with these obsolete ways, and his adamant recourse to use them at a time no longer fitting, that, in the end, will be deduced by the wise to be mentalities that are dumb and illiterate. For Filipinos today are, increasingly, no longer like this. Actually, quite the reverse is true now for many.

Just Another *Trapo* After All

Why is it that even after a glorious start, popular and all, with even a dominant coalition of bureaucrats forming behind him in his first year as the nation's leader, P-Noy seems to be finding it ever more daunting to exercise just the slightest control over the public mind? To a people that's becoming so sophisticated in their lifestyles and more and more discerning with information, P-Noy's yellow army seems to have been reduced to a meaningless cliché, like his doggone "straight path".

In front of a hundred million Filipinos diversifying and being enhanced by technological advances at such a phenomenal rate, P-Noy seems to be diminishing in importance, as if he's gradually turning into a useless old clown. Every solution he presents to deal with the nation's problems often comes too late and already way beside the point by the time of implementation.

Now approaching the end of his term, he is ultimately viewed as someone who cannot accomplish much as he is caught in many instances where he seems speechless if not clueless, frequently backtracking on his words at the drop of a hat, or ending up changing his stance to a position that is the complete opposite of his primary argument. He is called a "lame duck" president because of his regular resolve of having inaction as an official response to many emergencies, but also because of his incessant tendency to take a bizarrely ambiguous stance on every crucial issue, so that things are left unresolved and often hanging in a string of stalemates. Calls for his resignation have become considerably audible, and there have been several serious moves to already impeach him.

Why and how has it come to this? Simple. P-Noy, clearly, has gone the way of *trapos*. *Trapos* have a fairly common agenda: seduce the masses with false promises and under false pretenses in order to get the majority vote, and then forget these once on the throne so as to concentrate on achieving political and personal agendas, while all the time still pretending to fulfill the mandate of the majority.

Needless to say, a deceptive leadership that only exploits and does not involve the majority in the determining the fate of the nation, and puts political and personal goals ahead of the country and the public, can't possibly be considered as something that's in line with good governance. That's plain bad leadership, as a matter of fact. And it's always going to be bad, if the common weal, the concerns and needs of the masses, are not on the topmost agenda.

Looking back, it was actually commonplace for *trapos* like Ferdinand Marcos and Gloria Arroyo to ignore the grunts and groans of the masses, not caring if this results in some unpopularity, and instead pursues more power, the perpetuation of ruling position, and the increase of measures that allow for their tyranny over others. They were the most unpopular and yet they are two of the longest staying presidents.



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P-Noy, at present, obviously does not have popularity in mind also as he clings to a peculiar predisposition to endorse Mar Roxas' candidacy for president in 2016, instead of conceding to the remarkably trending Grace Poe who is clearly embraced by the majority. Was there not a buzz early this year about P-Noy, charter change and the possibility of term extension?

Anyone but a *trapo*

Perhaps our disappointments with P-Noy will find the most positive use behind us, with our heartfelt sighs that charge it all to experience. But then again, we might find good use for them in our future too.

P-Noy may not be a corrupt and avaricious thief, but he is, at least to many, a myopic and erring leader. And probably the most fatal of his mistakes is his choice to still govern as a traditional politician, when he had a very good opportunity not to be, and instead be new, revolutionary, and engaging...a leader for our time. Our mistake on the other hand, as the citizens of this nation, is tied up with our failure to realize the fact that, in the past three decades, electing *trapos* has been the mortal pitfall we've damned ourselves to relive.

Are we a nation of morons that we'd interpret the widespread fraud and corruption in government as normal things in a working democracy? Could we not tell if our leaders are competent and trustworthy or corrupt and consigned to hypocrisy?

We are a sovereign nation and yet clearly a neo-colony of the United States of America. We claim a national territory and yet are sharing shoals with China, while disavowing our biggest island to Muslim autonomy. We assert that we are an agricultural country and yet we are the world's biggest importer of rice (which our supposed Food Authority allows to just rot in warehouses while poor Filipinos starve). We are allegedly a nation against the tyranny of political dynasties and yet we are ruled by these. We are supposed to renounce war as an instrument of policy and rather adhere to the policy of peace, and yet we can't seem to achieve peace in Mindanao. We believe our Armed Forces are the protector of the people, and yet in the last two decades our military has targeted, killed, injured, tortured, abused and declared war against no other nationality but Filipinos. Our government is supposed to inculcate upon the youth patriotism and nationalism, and yet it maintains a labor export policy and even sets targets for OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers) remittances. We are supposed to maintain honesty and integrity in the public service, taking positive and effective measures against graft and corruption, and yet we pardon the corrupt, who in the first place are hardly convicted for the entirety of their crimes, and even allow them to be re-elected again as presidents of this country.

Our democracy is malfunctioning to the point of failure. Our government is currently entangled in situations that seem to have come out of the Twilight Zone. Our economy is idiotically hinged on foreign investments, and so we spend billions of pesos launching programs set to attract tourists and foreign investors to this country...where justice and human rights are but faint echoes in antiquated podiums, if not attachments to nauseatingly overused rhetoric that are devoid of sincerity and substance. And our nation's government appears to be no longer there, or has become hopelessly indefinable and disconnected from the heart of the Filipino masses.

Corrupt, traitorous leaders are to blame for this profound degeneration of our civilization. And we, the electorate, own the blame for electing the worst possible leaders, instead of the best, most honorable and deserving Filipinos. We allowed crooks, immoral people, and the selfish to be in precious public offices and national institutions where honor and integrity are pre-requisites, the very traits they are void of. In the guise of traditional politicians, the wretched have secured the ruling class, capitalizing on our gullibility and our lack of discernment. And we let this happen again and again, to the detriment of our freedom, our happiness, our nation's future, and our children.

The question is: Are we going to let such negligence and irresponsibility deter our nation's progress again?

Will you vote in next year's Presidential Elections? If you will, then, for goodness' sake, let us take this one chance for our dreams of good governance and true progress to finally come true. NO MORE TRAPOS. Perhaps by just getting into a line of thinking that emphasizes electing to the leadership "anyone but a *trapo*", we can already have a forceful enough catalyst to wrench ourselves out of the madness that we currently refer to as Philippine politics.

Not a single *trapo* was able to deliver genuine economic and political progress before, and not one can seem to do so today. So why not try the only thing that could overturn odds completely, so that our fears of yet another bad government are rendered humorous like the jokes who have been ruling these islands.?

Isn't it high time already to dispell the illusion that tricks us into seeing our nation's enemies as its rightful leaders dressed as traditional politicians? Has the day not come yet for us to question the very legitimacy and authenticity of our democracy in the hands of the selfish and oppressive *trapos*—the scam artists and avaricious thieves and arrogant hypocrites who mean to embody the very authority that purges the likes of them from our society?

Come on, all ye patriots. Don't just sit on the sidelines and say, "So what?", but rather make the big change. VOTE. BUT DON'T VOTE FOR TRAPOS.

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Turtle-riding Man Draws Flak From Netizens

In Tacloban City, photos of a man riding a leatherback sea turtle, locally known as pawikan, recently went viral on social media. Telling from the photo, the turtle was about six feet long and three feet wide. The photo also showed the turtle was tied to a bamboo post, and this made netizens go ballistic.

It appears the man riding the turtle is Jose Lastimado, the former village chief of Pinamitinan and president of the Association of Barangay Councils or Marabut, Samar. And perhaps uploading on his Facebook account six photos featuring such a scene, last August 6, will come down as one of the most re-



gretful things he ever did in his life. A hell storm of enraged comments and reprimands immediately battered his post, titled "Big catch pawikan in Brgy Sta Rita Marabut Samar (sic)".

According to a report by lawyer Danilo Suarez of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) community environment and natural resources office in Samar, the leatherback turtle was caught in the fish net of a certain Jessy Amora, about one kilometer away from the shoreline of the village, on Aug. 5 around 1:30 a.m. The officer-in-charge of DENR's Conservation and Development Division, Corazon Horca Makabenta, said the turtle was released back to the sea "after the DENR took photodocs and measurements at 11 a.m. in the morning that same day."

Through her Facebook account, Makabenta also thanked the public for their "expression of concern and support." She said the person who "maltreated" the turtle would be charged with violation of Republic Act 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act.

It did not take so long afterwards before Lastimado had deactivated his Facebook account.

The leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is considered an endangered species here and elsewhere in the world. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) describes it as the "largest of all living sea turtles and the fourth largest modern reptile behind three crocodilians." Adult leatherback sea turtles can



reportedly grow to as long as nine feet and weigh an average of 300 to 500 kilos. Data show that the largest leatherback sea turtle ever recorded had a length of about 10 feet and weighed 916 kilos.

Why Boracay Will Remain A Hotspot

A study on the vacation habits of affluent Asians shows that pristine beaches and upscale hotels top the list for family vacations.

The Visa Affluent Study 2015, conducted among rich Asia-Pacific families, shows that the destination is just as important as the quality of accommodation. Upscale hotels to mid-scale ones were the most preferred, although boutique hotels were also popular among respondents from Australia, China, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The study also looked into the travel patterns of well-off consumers in eight major markets in Asia Pacific. According to findings, four out of five, or 82 percent of respondents have traveled with their families in the past 12 months and that they prefer to spend their holidays within the region.

Japan ranked as the top destination, over the past 12 months, garnering 26 percent of respondents' preference. This was followed by Hong Kong and Australia. Around the same time, the survey showed the region's most frequent affluent travelers are those from Singapore and China (3.1 trips each), followed by Hong Kong (2.8 trips) and India (2.0 trips).

James Lim, Visa head of consumer products for Asia and Pacific, said family vacations have become important occasions that affluent families in the region look forward to every year.



Visa country manager for the Philippines and Guam, Stuart Tomlinson, said the Philippines, with its abundance of white sand beaches, island resorts and popular shopping destinations, is well positioned to attract affluent travelers. "The results of the study present an opportunity for the public and private sectors to boost tourism activities and make the country a preferred destination," he said.

Boracay, in particular, matches such a destination and is in a very good position to grab this opportunity. When asked for the main activities when traveling abroad, 44 percent of respondents said their top pick is relaxing on a beach, 36 percent want shopping in popular or large shopping centers and 35 percent prefer exploring landmarks independently. 27 percent of respondents, said they travel to try out popular local restaurants. And Boracay offers all these in a neatly wrapped package.

Foreign arrivals in the Philippines averaged over four million in the past three years, with an average receipt of over \$4 billion per year. It seems quite a lot, but on a global scale, it accounts for only less than two percent of active tourists.

The market is huge. This means Boracay is yet to hit its peak as a favorite destination.



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Landco Pacific Celebrates 25 Years of Novel Concept Living

Landco Pacific Corp. celebrates its 25th year of being at the forefront of resort living and a pioneer of lifestyle products that has resulted in the conceptualization of residential resorts, leisure farms and leisure tourism estates to the local real estate industry.

The Xerez-Burgos family founded it in 1990, with Landco's flagship development being the 88-hectare Peninsula de Punta Fuego in Nasugbu, Batangas, touted the country's first exclusive and world-class seaside residential resort.

Alfred Xerez-Burgos Jr., the president and CEO then described the property as "a diamond in the rough," remembering when access was only through rough roads and one even had to go the rest of the way by foot from the barrio.

"It wasn't easy. We had to carve out a system where we could connect Metro Manila to this place", he said.

On the other hand, the Roxas family, Landco's land partner for Punta Fuego, represented by Pedro Roxas, had been wanting to develop their property, but couldn't quite find the right partner who shared the same vision, until Landco came into the picture 25 years ago.

"It was very rough then, but that was part of the beauty of the place, it was very natural," Roxas recalls. "It took a lot of guts, a leap of faith," Roxas said of initiating the project.

Now, Peninsula de Punta Fuego caters to the elite who want a quick getaway from manic work days during the week. The homeowners and members of the leisure community enjoy the peninsula's long coastline speckled with lovely coves, plus a lifestyle accentuated by gastronomical feats prepared by chef Mikel Arriet Arruiz and full amenities provided by Club Punta Fuego.

Following the success of Club Punta Fuego are upscale beach resort Terrazas de Punta Fuego and luxury oceanfront condominium Amara en Terrazas soon followed.

Other Landco properties that sprouted are Playa Calatagan with the



Aquaria beach resort and Playa Laiya, both in Batangas, and Playa Azlea in Samal, Davao. Aside from these, they also got into developing luxury home communities in the provinces, including WoodGrove Park in San Fernando, Pampanga; Waterwood Park in Baliuag, Bulacan; MonteLago Nature Estates in San Pablo, Laguna; The Courtyard at Lakewood Golf Estates in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija; and Woodridge Garden Village in Zamboanga City.

Xerez-Burgos then retired and was succeeded by his son Alfred III. And it seems the elder Xerez-Burgos could not hide his pride in the way his legacy was carried on, saying, "He did a beautiful concept called Leisure Farms in Tagaytay, where lot buyers can become weekend farmers."

This weekend farming concept – at Leisure Farms in Lemery, Batangas and Ponderosa Leisure Farms in Silang, Cavite – has proven to be an attractive concept, especially with the organic, healthy, farm-to-table trend gaining popularity.

Current Landco president and CEO Alfred Xerez-Burgos III said, "For the last 25 years, Landco has made leisure its business, so that families may have the opportunity to spend quality time together. As we look ahead to the next 25 years, the company will continue to explore new concepts in leisure development that are relevant to the changing needs of the Filipino family."

On moving forward, he said, "We will be building on the brand that we have established and continue to fulfill the brand promise, life at your leisure," keeping in mind what Landco values most: family time and bonding, enjoying God's gifts and nature, taking care of nature, making memories that are priceless.

"Moving forward, we would like to introduce leisure tourism estates that offer the experience to a bigger market," said the CEO.

Plans are in the works for hotels and a more dynamic boardwalk with commercial spaces, restaurants, shops and aqua sports.

OTHER NEWS

Coca-Cola pouring in add'l \$1.2 B in Phl

Aiming to bolster its operations in one of its largest markets in the world, Atlanta-based The Coca-Cola Co. is pouring in billions of dollars anew to the Philippines.

According to Coca-Cola group president for Asia Pacific, Atul Singh, the beverage company, together with its bottling partner for the Philippines Fomento Economico Mexicano S.A.B. de C.V. (Femsa), is investing \$1.2 billion up to 2020 to expand its facilities and beef up distribution and operations in the Philippines.

"The money", Singh said, "would be invested in more manufacturing lines, in trucks, in equipment, in distribution infrastructure, in marketing, in developing people, and training. So it's a broad spectrum of investments across the board."

"We have high hopes of our business moving forward in the Philippines. The Philippines is a very important market to us and we have strong plans for it," he added.

Coca-Cola has already invested \$1.5 billion in the country from 2010 to 2014, Singh said. The said investment supposedly enhanced its distribution network, while creating at the same time over 2,000 new jobs for Filipinos. It also led to the expansion of the Coca-Cola Canlubang plant, an considerable increase in production of its Misamis Oriental plant, the rehabilitation of its plant in Tacloban, and the purchase of a manufacturing plant in Davao del Sur from San Miguel Corp.

Coca-Cola currently has 19 plants in the Philippines and competes in seven different beverage categories locally.

"When you look at Asia Pacific, the Philippines is a very big player for us in the Asean market. It is a strategic market for us in Asia and that's why we have made some substantial investments and we have strong plans for the future to continue to build on our investment. It is a strategically important market and it is a market we would like to continue to invest behind," Singh explains, pointing out that the amount of investment to be pumped in the country by Coca-Cola over the next five years will be aimed at expanding its support for the robust economic growth of the Philippines.



"Typically as we expand the business we will employ more people in the sales field and we will employ more people in the distribution side. But more than just direct employment, what is important also is indirect employment. As we invest and expand our business, there is a big multiplier effect in many other industries like in packaging, people who make the bottles, crowns, the logistics, raw material, all of them expands. That's the beauty of our system. We look at sustainability for our entire value chain, not just our business," Singh added.

A three-day trip to the country recently by Coca-Cola officials was done in recognition of the company's strong commitment of making major investments in the Philippines.

In line with this, Coca-Cola chairman and chief executive officer Muhtar Kent met with President Aquino to emphasize the vital role of the Philippine market in helping the company attain milestone growth in recent years.

President Aquino was said to seem very pleased in learning about Coca-Cola's planned investment in the country and commended the firm for its commitment of not only expanding its business but also for implementing programs that advance the economic and social goals.

On that note, Singh concluded, "We are really proud of our relationship with the Filipino people over the 100 years we've been here. It is a country with very happy people and their values go very closely with Coca-Cola. So clearly, there is a great common values system between the consumer of the Philippines and our brands at Coca-Cola."

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