

Scandals: A guide to GMA's legacy

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(Last of a series)

The following is a yearly calendar of shock-and-awe stories that involve corruption in high places and weak leadership.

Year 2006

FG in \$20,000 hotel suite!

During Manny Pacquiao's match with Erick

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Morales in Las Vegas, the First Gentleman allegedly spent a \$200,000-worth suite at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Mike said there was nothing corrupt about accepting the free luxury suite offered to him by the hotel. He argued that as the husband of a board of seats, he was entitled to such perks.

No German bank account

Rep. Alan Peter Cayetano claimed that a member of the Arroyo family maintained a bank account in Germany amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. First Gentleman Arroyo flew to Germany and secured a certification from the bank to disprove Cayetano's claims. Upon his return, he sought Cayetano's expulsion from Congress without success.

Toxic JPPEA?

The Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPPEA) was signed between Arroyo and former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. The treaty aimed to promote investments and trade between the two countries. Various civil society groups questioned the agreement because the government did not consult them. According to these groups, although the agreement secures employment in Japan, the treaty includes an "environmentally unjust bilateral trade."

In 2008, the Senate finally ratified the agreement by a vote of 16-14 as the agreement was favorable to 96 percent of exports from the Philippines to Japan will have zero duties.

Meanwhile, numerous representatives from the House questioned the Senate decision, as the agreement "will bring a tsunami of unfair trade and unfair wages."

Estrada pardon

After spending six years in detention on plunder, graft and corruption charges, former President Joseph Estrada was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Sandiganbayan in October 2007. Three days after, President Arroyo granted him pardon, citing a policy to release prisoners aged 70.

Fallout from ZTE

The scandal was exposed in August 2007, a few months after then-transport Secretary Loren Meraldo and ZTE Corp. vice president Yu Yong signed a \$205-million contract for a national broadband network deal in April. President Arroyo and the First Gentleman were said to have visited China for the contract signing.

Rep. Carlos Padilla (Nueva Vizcaya) said that Counselor chairman Benjamin Abalos also joined the President in China to broker the deal. Abalos' closest broker in the deal but admitted going to China four times. In September 2007, the son of speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. testified that he was with Abalos in

China and that Abalos demanded money from ZTE officials.

The following day, the Supreme Court promulgated a TRO stopping the deal and gave ZTE 15 days to comment.

NEDA chairman Romulo Neri testified in the Senate hearings and said Abalos tried to bribe him. Neri said P200 million but he refused to answer some senators' questions, citing executive privilege. Abalos reacted as Comexel chairman in October 2007 as President Arroyo canceled the deal in a trip to China.

Jun Lozada, former chief executive officer of Philippine Forest Corp and NEDA consultant, testified in February 2008 that Abalos and the First Gentleman were to receive kickbacks once the deal was signed. Speaker De Venecia was unimpressed and got dragged into the deal when his son said he was also in China.

On July 2008, the SC dismissed three petitions that questioned the constitutionality of the deal and declared the deal null and academic.

Impeachment: Pardo's version

Layner Rod Pardo filed an impeachment complaint against President Arroyo. Endorsed by an administration ally, Laguna Rep. Edgar Sison, the case was seen as a move to foil another complaint against the President.

Congress thrashed the complaint.

Money from Malacanang

Pampangans Gov. Eddie Panlilio revealed that he was given a paper bag containing P500,000 in a Malacanang meeting in October 2007. The money was allegedly for community projects. The bags were handed out by a female Malacanang staff.

Panlilio said he accepted the money because no conditions were attached; he did not consider it a bribe. Various versions of the source of the money came out as other local officials present in the meeting admitted receiving either P500,000 or P200,000.

Other officials who confirmed receiving money were Governors Joseito Mendoza and Leo Campos, and Representatives Rachel Arroyo, Antonio Cuenco, Bernardino Abante, Maestrico Domingo, Tomas Dumplac Jr. and some others who refused to be named. The named nine officials were charged by the Office of the Ombudsman for allegedly receiving bribes. Due to numerous versions on the source of the money, Sen. Miguel Zubair said during the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee hearing that the money has no direct link to the Palace.

Glorieta 2 and Batasan bombings

After the string of controversies bounding the Arroyo administration, bombing incidents happened in Glorieta 2 and the Batasan area. The police, in a speedy investigation, found that the bombing of Batasan was initially intended for Basilan. The Glorieta 2 bombing, on the other hand, resulted from go look-alikes. Rumors spread that the bombings were perpetrated by the government to divert the public's attention away from the Arroyo scandals.

The Batasan bombing happened the day before Pampangans Gov. Ed Panlilio was set to testify on the bribery case local officials in the Senate and a day before the House justice committee was to hold the impeachment case.

The Glorieta 2 bombing happened during the height of the bribery case which took place in Malacanang.

Manila Pen siege

Antonio Trillanes IV, together with Brigs. Gen. Danilo Lim and 25 other Maglolo officers, marched out of their trail and walked on the streets of Makati City. Former Vice President Teofisto Guingona and some soldiers from the AFP joined the march that ended in The Peninsula Manila Hotel. After several hours, the group surrendered to the government forces after a military siege. They were arrested and several journalists were detained.

Missing: Jonas Burgos

Of the numerous human rights violations, political killings, and abductions during Arroyo's administration, the case of activist Jonas Burgos has become the most prominent. Burgos has been missing since late April in the eyeswitness said he was dragged from a mall on Commonwealth Avenue in Quezon City to a Toyota Rover five men. The license plate of the Rover was traced to the 566 Infantry Battalion camp in Bulacan.

Teehankee pardon

In 1991, Claudio Teehankee Jr was sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of killing Marston Halbronn and John Roland Chapman, and wounding Lito Lino. In November 2008, President Arroyo granted Teehankee pardon. It was reported that the pardon was "kept away" and denied receiving the money.

Euro generals

In an interop conference in Moscow, police commander director Elbio de Paz and his group were detained for carrying undeclared cash worth 105,000 euros (P9.5 million). At the time of the conference, De Paz had already retired from service.

When the group returned, the Senate called for hearings on the issue. De La Paz said the money was "cash advance" for "emergency cases." His statement was questioned as PNPA chief Director General Jesus Arroyo said the money was for

reaching intelligence equipment. The Senate recommended that the justice department and the Ombudsman conduct a preliminary investigation on the PNPA delinquency. The Interpol assembly as the group violated the travel ban under administrative Order No. 103, the law on allowable travel expenses, and the rule on exit reified officials or those about to retire. The report also proposed a preliminary investigation on the Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno and Verano for allowing the group to travel and for ignoring the travel ban.

As of March 2009, De La Paz settled the remaining \$50,000 euros, fully paying for the cash advance and avoiding a civil law suit.

C-5 insertion

Senators Pardo Lacson and Jim Maglaling withheld the beans on Senate president Manny Villar when they exposed his double insertion of a P20-million C-5 project in the 2008 budget. After a few months, Villar resigned as Senate president when he learned about the planned "ouster" led by Lacson. Juan Ponce Enrile became Senate president.

In May 2009, although Villar was out of the country, the Senate ethics committee deliberated on the alleged C-5 insertion and declared the ethics complaint filed by Maglaling as sufficient in substance.

Meralco and the tainted court

What started out as a tag-of-war between the Lopezos and GSIS over control of Meralco ended up tainting the reputation of the Court of Appeals. The scandal started when Justice Jose Sison Jr. told the media that he was offered a P70-million bribe by an alleged Meralco emissary, businessman Francis Bero.

The Supreme Court conducted a public investigation on the CA Justices. Lapses in the Justices' decisions and CA procedures were unearthed. The verdict Justice Vicente Reyes was dismissed, Sison and Justice Bernardino Myra were suspended, and Justice Reynaldo Villan was reinstated.

Impeachment: Joey's complaint

Joey de Venecia, son of former House Speaker Jose de Venecia, filed an impeachment complaint against President Arroyo, particularly because of the overpaid NBN-ZTE deal. The complaint was found sufficient in form but was dismissed after House representatives voted 42-8, ruling the complaint as insufficient in substance.

Resurrecting nuclear power plant

Baric Rep. Mark Caguioang and Pampangans Rep. Juan Miguel "Miley" Arroyo filed HR 4687 or the Batasan nuclear power plant commissioning act, a bill aimed at rehabilitating the mothballed power plant for 2.4 Billion. Various groups were strongly against the re-opening of the plant, stating that more viable and cheaper options are available, like renewable energy. A feasibility study was requested from

Cojaers to prove that BNPFT's structures are still in good condition.

A consolidated HR 6300 was submitted to the House and will be deliberated after the legislative break in July.

The failed ancestral domain agreement

In June 2001, President Arroyo signed the GRP-MILF Tripoli agreement in Libya, paving the way for peace talks between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). By May 2003, due to numerous bombings in Mindanao, Arroyo canceled the peace talks. Talks resumed two months later in Kuala Lumpur.

In January 2004, peace monitors from Malaysia, Brunei and Libya visited the MILF to monitor the five-year truce between the two parties. The discussion on ancestral domain progressed and was divided into three parts: territory, resources, and governance.

By November 2007, government panel chairman Rodolfo Garcia and MILF peace panel chairman M. Hagher Iqbal said the agreement could finally be concluded. But by December of the same year, the ancestral domain negotiations reached a deadlock due to constitutional issues.

The text of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) caused a big stir when it leaked to the press. In August 2007, the Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order ending the peace agreement and suggested renegotiating the homeland deal.

In September 2008, government dissolved the panel conducting the peace negotiations with the MILF, formed a new one, and announced that the MILF will turn over two rogue field commanders and other members who attacked the peace process.

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Red Cross kidnapping

In January, government on motorcycles intercepted an international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and kidnapped three workers: Italian Eugenio Vagno, Swiss Antonio Natter, and a Filipino, Neri de Lacaba. The group behind it, identified as the Abu Sayyaf, asked for ransom. The Philippine Red Cross, the ICRC, and the Swiss embassy to pay the ransom. The group threatened to behead the workers.

Three months after the kidnapping, after numerous negotiations, Natter was released. A few days after, Vagno was released as well. Vagno, after six months of being held captive, was eventually released July 12.

Con-ass

In 2003, Arroyo initiated a move to change the Constitution and amend the present presidential bicameral republic into a parliamentary unicameral form of government but failed.

By late 2006, the House elected a plan to revise the Constitution through a constituent assembly. In June 2009, two days before the House adjourned, they passed HR 1109. The bill calls for a constituent assembly to amend the 1986 Constitution.

Dacer-Corbido double murder case

After spending years in America, Cesar Manoso returned and was willing to speak out on the murder of publicist Bibby Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbido in 2000. Manoso became a state witness in July 2007.

Aside from Manoso, 21 others were accused of the same charges. According to Manoso, he has no real fear of anyone, particularly of Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who consequently denied having a hand in the crime.

The case was asked by former President Estrada to boost his image during the height of the BIV scam and the latter's impeachment trial. The case was asked to have the help of BW Resources Corp., a gaming firm in which Estrada owned shares.

The scam started when it was found out that BIV was an exclusive contract to operate line-bingo and introduce Quick Pick 2 in 1999, a game similar to jai-alai. That same year, PAGCOR granted BW a nationwide exclusive bingo franchise. Further investigation revealed that Dante Tan, Estrada's alleged financial director during the latter's presidential bid, had been heavily buying shares in BIV.

In late 2003, the charred bodies of Dacer and Corbido were found in a creek in Cavite and eyewitnesses said they were abducted and killed by policemen. Some of the witnesses said they were in the midst of a mastermind of the killing through Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force chief Lacson.

CARP extension

A few days before the House's

legislative body, the body passed House Bill 4077 to extend the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law for another five years. The House approved the bill on the floor and acquisition and distribution, support services, and other funding requirements. The Senate has also approved the bill.

In 2007, Arroyo certified as urgent a bill to extend the law. The program has yet to distribute a million hectares to another two million beneficiaries.

RR bill

In June, the controversial House Bill 5083 or reproductive health bill was trashed in the House of Representatives, as it failed to gather enough signatures and was not passed in the House. Since it was filed last year, numerous groups, especially from the opposition, had contested the passing of the bill.

In February, seven senators reiterated their support for the bill. Arroyo said he would not sign the bill. Journalists while the bill was being deliberated in the House that she would not hesitate to trash it should it contain provisions that would curtail press freedom.

Right of reply bill

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Baselines bill

In March, Arroyo signed Republic Act 9522 or the Philippine Archipelagic Baselines Law, a controversial law that defines the country's maritime baselines. The bill includes the Scarborough Shoal and Kalayaan Island Group. The bill includes the Kalayaan Group of Islands and Scarborough Shoal as parts of "regime of islands, reefs, banks, atolls, and other natural formations that surround the islands." China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei.

Misuse of Bailikatan funds

Navy Lt. Nancy Gadian received an alleged mismanagement of funds in the Philippines. Gadian was accused of working with the United States, according to Gadian, Gen. Eugenio Garcia, former Mindanao Command head, and other officials. The Blackwater exercises were given a P45-million fund.

Arroyo ordered the defense department to conduct an investigation. Lt. Col. Roberto Bravero Jr., AFP public information officer chief, said the alleged misused funds were for the Blackwater exercises. He also challenged Garcia to come out and file a proper complaint.

GMA in Congress?

Due to rumors that Arroyo is planning to run for Congress, election observers are already speculating on provisions that require Arroyo to resign as President if he runs for a lower post. They cite Sec. 67 of the Constitution, which states that he was reelected in the Fair Elections Act passed in 2001, Arroyo's first year as President after EDSA 2.

Arroyo's status as "any elective official, whether national or local, running for any office other than the one which he is holding in a permanent capacity, except for President and Vice President, shall be considered ipso facto resigned from his office upon the filing of his certificate of candidacy.

Helicopter crash

In April 2009, a helicopter carrying eight passengers, two of whom were Cabinet undersecretaries and a senior military aide, crashed in the mountains of Baguio. The Philippine Air Force (PAF) blamed bad weather for the accident.

Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, chairman of the Senate committee on defense, said that the helicopter was allowed to fly from Lookan Airport in Baguio in the afternoon. The weather was low and why there was no back-up helicopter provided at the time. There were allegations that the helicopter was misused. The investigation was used to ferry Rep. Mike Arroyo to the President's estate, son, from Manila to Baguio.

According to Press Secretary Gerge Remonde, the helicopter indeed carried Mikey and the others from Manila and arrived in Baguio at past two in the afternoon. The pilot of the other helicopter which carried Arroyo and her party. The same helicopter Mikey used to see the helicopter used by the eight passengers who were supposed to conduct an ocular inspection of the Halsema Highway. Arroyo was scheduled to visit Baguio on the same day.

Sources: Various news reports