

As I See It

# Philippines: RP family dynasties proliferating like mushrooms

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THE present constitution bans family political dynasties because when only one family lords it over a particular community, it denies other talented members of the community the chance to be of service to that community. This constitutional ban is clearly needed, but because nobody has bothered to file the needed implementing law, it is being violated left and right. In fact, since the new Constitution was ratified by the people, family dynasties have increased tremendously instead of decreasing.

How can there be any implementing law when most of the members of both houses of Congress are themselves members of family dynasties? In fact, many politicians are consciously building up their family dynasties in their provinces. Wives, husbands, siblings, children, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces and in-laws are all groomed to succeed in varying political positions to keep and concentrate political power in the hands of family dynasties.

We see that happening in Bataan, Biliran, Zambales and many other provinces.

True, we see a priest taking political power away from the Lapid, father and son, in Pampanga, and a Grace Padaca taking it away from the Dy clan in Isabela, but they are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Instead, top officials of the land who should otherwise set the example in obeying the Constitution are themselves violating it. President Macapagal-Arroyo is expanding her own family dynasty. Two of her sons and a brother-in-law are congressmen.

Most other former presidents have done the same thing. Ex-President Joseph Estrada had his legal wife and a son elected senators at the same time and a second son elected mayor of their bailiwick of San Juan. President Marcos had his son and a daughter and a nephew lording it over Ilocos Norte; while he was still in power, he had his wife, brother, sister and brother-in-law lording it over most of the Philippines. Descendants of President Magsaysay are at present lording it over Zambales, etc., etc.

The Senate, whose members are supposed to be more intelligent and responsible, is no exception. Aside from the Estrada mother and son, the Senate has two siblings, Pia and Alan Peter Cayetano, together in the Senate.

The House of Representatives is even worse. Many of its members have relatives as governors, mayors, board members, councilors and even barangay officials of their home municipalities and provinces.

Metro Manila, where enlightened and intelligent Filipinos supposedly live, is no exception. Many of the mayors in the metropolis merely exchange places with their wives and children when their terms run out. Makati Mayor Jojo Binay, who is running for vice president, had his wife replace him at City

Hall before. Next year, he will have a son run for congressman of Makati. Mayor Sonny Belmonte has his daughter Joy running for vice mayor of Quezon City. MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando had his wife Marides replace him as mayor of Marikina when his term ran out. Next year, he will run for the presidency no less. In Muntinlupa, the Biazons, father and son, are kings. And in nearby Las Piñas, Sen. Manny Villar, who is also running for president, and his wife, Representative Cynthia, are king and queen.

In neighboring Parañaque, two family dynasties, the Bernabe and Olivarez clans, will fight it out next year.

Mayor Florencio Bernabe will have graduating Rep. Ed Zialcita as his opponent for mayor next year. But Zialcita is merely a proxy of the Olivarez clan. The Olivarezes are attempting to make a comeback in Parañaque after suffering major setbacks in their unfortunate sally into Laguna politics.

It will be recalled that Edwin Olivarez, son of former Parañaque Mayor Pablo Olivarez, was soundly beaten in the 2007 gubernatorial contest in Laguna. Licking his wounds, Edwin wants to lead the clan's political comeback by running for congressman in the city's first district.

The real target, however, is the mayoralty post. The plan is to capture the first congressional post first, which is being vacated by Ed Zialcita, and then gun for city hall in 2013.

Apparently, Bernabe is aware of this plot. The mayor is in poor health; he just had surgery for a quadruple heart bypass, and it is clear that he cannot wage a successful campaign for reelection. But instead of passing the baton to his allies as he had agreed earlier, he is now digging in with his relatives to the exclusion of the time-tested principle that "politics is addition."

His apparent response to the Zialcita-Olivarez alliance is a Bernabe-Bernabe team even if Parañaque voters hate political dynasties. Bernabe could have easily raised the dynasty issue against the Olivarez clan. Edwin's younger brother Eric is an incumbent city councilor and is also running for reelection. But by fielding his brother to run against Edwin and his son in the second district, he lost the moral upper hand. Now the political dynasty issue is being used against him.

Not only that, speculation is that Bernabe is building his own family dynasty.

Just recently, Bernabe's former political ally, ex-Mayor Joey Marquez—who has just been acquitted of graft charges—has joined the mayoralty contest. Bernabe may lose another important ally, Rep. Roilo Golez of the second district. Golez seems to have been offended by the Bernabe succession plan that leaves him out in the cold.

Some Bernabe sympathizers are urging the mayor to junk the Bernabe-Bernabe-Bernabe formula. According to them, the mayor's brother does not stand a chance in the first district. He is a far third in the latest surveys, behind popular broadcast journalist Ed Javier, who is, in turn, trailing Vice Gov. Edwin Olivarez by only two percentage points, a statistical tie.

**By Neal Cruz**

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