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THE STATE OF THE NATION IN AI

Global AI Council Philippines (GACPh)

SPEAKERS



ATTY. MARK S. GORRICETA
Corporate Secretary
& Co-Founder
GACPh



DR. DONALD PATRICK LIM
Chairman
& Co-Founder
GACPh



MS. CATHERINE S. JALANDONI
Founder
& President
GACPh

MODERATOR



ANTONIO D.C. MAURICIO
Chairman & Founder
InnovationPH

**At the Crossroads of
Sovereignty and Truth**

*The Rotary Club of Manila's
23rd Weekly Membership Meeting*

**District Meeting
and Fellowship**

**STEWARDSHIP OF
CONTINUITY**

**Alberto
Gatmaitan
Romulo and
the Discipline
of Public Service**

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PROGRAM



ROTARY CLUB OF MANILA 24th Weekly Membership Meeting Rotary Year 2025-2026

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 12:30 PM
Manila Polo Club

Moderator: SEC. ANTONILO D.C. "Anton" MAURICIO

PART I

11:00 AM Registration /Lunch

12:30 PM Call to Order | **PRES. RAOUL C. CREENCIA**

Invocation

DE DELFIN N. "Del" LORENZANA

Philippine National Anthem | **AVP**

Rotary Club of Manila Hymn
RCM WF Music Chorale

The Four (4) Way Test
RTN. STEVE "Momo" MOMMAERTS

Acknowledgement of Guests
SEC. ANTONILO D.C. "Anton" MAURICIO

Welcome Song | **RCM WF Music Chorale**

Birthday Celebrants

Mar. 07 DGND Hermie Esguerra

Mar. 08 Rtn. Brendan Egan

Mar. 11 Rtn. JB Pallasigue

Rtn. Ben Ibuyan

STAR Rtn. Winston Ginez

Maligayang Bati / Happy Birthday Song
RCM WF Chorale

PART II

12:55 PM President's Time
PRES. RAOUL C. CREENCIA

1:00 PM Introduction of the Guest Speakers
SEC. ANTONILO D.C. "Anton" MAURICIO

Guest Speakers

ATTY. MARK S. GORRICETA
Corporate Secretary & Co-Founder, GACPh

DR. DONALD PATRICK LIM
Chairman & Co-Founder, GACPh

MS. CATHERINE S. JALANDONI
Founder & President, GACPh

Address:
"THE STATE OF THE NATION IN AI"

1:30 PM Open Forum / Q&A

1:45 PM Presentation of Certificate of Appreciation
PRES. RAOUL C. CREENCIA

2:00 PM Adjournment
PRES. RAOUL C. CREENCIA

EDITORIAL

Reginald T. Yu
Editor-in-Chief



THERE are moments in history when the world quietly crosses an invisible threshold — when a new force begins to shape economies, societies, and even the way human beings understand themselves. Today, that force is **Artificial Intelligence**. It is transforming industries, redefining productivity, and altering the contours of global competition with a speed that few could

have imagined only a decade ago. For a nation like the Philippines, standing at the intersection of opportunity and uncertainty in the digital age, the question is no longer whether artificial intelligence will influence our future, but how prepared we are to shape that future responsibly.

It is therefore both timely and consequential that the Rotary Club of Manila, through its 24th Weekly Membership Meeting, brings attention to the theme “**The State of the Nation in AI.**” This gathering invites Rotarians to engage with one of the most important conversations of our era — the emergence of artificial intelligence and related technologies such as blockchain as transformative forces that will influence nearly every sector of Philippine society. As the country continues its transition toward a knowledge-driven economy, the discussion on AI has moved beyond the laboratories of technologists and into the broader arenas of public policy, governance, business, and civic leadership.

Artificial intelligence has already begun reshaping the world in ways

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both visible and subtle. Algorithms increasingly guide financial decisions, enhance medical diagnostics, optimize logistics networks, and personalize digital experiences. Across the globe, governments are grappling with how to harness these capabilities while safeguarding ethical principles and public trust. For emerging economies like the Philippines, the stakes are particularly high. AI represents both an extraordinary opportunity for national advancement and a challenge that requires foresight, discipline, and collaboration.

For decades, the Philippines has built its reputation as a global center for talent in information technology and business process management. The country's workforce, young, dynamic, and highly adaptable, has been a critical driver of the digital services industry. Yet the rise of artificial intelligence is redefining the landscape in which that talent operates. Automation, machine learning, and intelligent systems are changing the nature of work itself. Jobs that once depended on repetitive processes are evolving toward roles that demand creativity,

strategic thinking, and advanced technical skills. The nation must therefore ensure that its workforce is not displaced by the new technological wave but empowered by it.

This transformation demands a holistic approach that integrates education, industry, and government policy. Universities must adapt their curricula to prepare students for the realities of a digital and AI-driven economy. Businesses must invest in innovation and research rather than merely adopting technologies developed elsewhere. Policymakers must craft frameworks that encourage progress while protecting the public interest. In this sense, artificial intelligence is not simply a technological issue — it is a national development issue.

Equally important is the ethical dimension of artificial intelligence. As machines become capable of making decisions that influence human lives, society must ask profound questions about accountability, fairness, and transparency. Algorithms trained on biased data can inadvertently reproduce inequality. Automated systems, if poorly governed, may

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undermine privacy and erode trust in institutions. These concerns remind us that technology itself is neutral; it is the values guiding its use that determine whether it becomes a force for progress or a source of unintended harm.

Here lies the enduring relevance of Rotary. For more than a century, the Rotary Club of Manila has stood as a forum where leaders from different fields gather to discuss ideas that shape the nation. Rotary's guiding principle of Service Above Self compels its members to view technological innovation not merely as a tool for profit but as a means of advancing the common good. When conversations about artificial intelligence take place within such a setting, they acquire a deeper dimension. They become discussions not only about innovation but about responsibility.

The Philippines is entering a critical moment in its digital evolution. Around the world, nations are racing to establish leadership in artificial intelligence. Investments in research laboratories, startup ecosystems, and technology infrastructure are accelerating. Countries that succeed in cultivating AI capabilities will not

only strengthen their economies but also shape the global standards governing this technology. Those that fail to adapt risk falling behind in a world increasingly driven by data and intelligent systems.

Yet the Philippines possesses advantages that should not be underestimated. The country's vibrant technology community, its entrepreneurial spirit, and its growing culture of innovation provide fertile ground for progress. Filipino ingenuity has repeatedly demonstrated an ability to transform constraints into opportunities. If these strengths are aligned with thoughtful policy and sustained investment in education and research, the nation can carve out a meaningful role in the global AI ecosystem.

Still, progress will require more than ambition. It will demand collaboration across sectors and a shared commitment to preparing society for the changes that lie ahead. Artificial intelligence cannot be viewed solely as a technological phenomenon; it must be understood as a societal transformation. It will influence employment, governance, national security, and even the ways

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communities interact with information and truth. The responsibility of leaders is therefore not only to embrace innovation but to guide it with wisdom.

This is why conversations such as the one convened at the Rotary Club of Manila are so vital. They create a space where civic leaders, professionals, entrepreneurs, and policymakers can reflect on the direction of the nation and the forces shaping its future. They remind us that technological change is not an abstract concept unfolding somewhere else in the world; it is happening here, within our own institutions, industries, and communities.

Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly transform the Philippines in the years ahead. The question is whether that transformation will be guided by deliberate strategy and ethical leadership or by the uncontrolled momentum of technological disruption. Forums like this gathering encourage the former. They invite thoughtful dialogue and inspire the kind of leadership

that ensures innovation remains aligned with the broader aspirations of society.

Ultimately, the rise of artificial intelligence is not just about machines learning to think. It is about human beings learning to lead in a world where technology moves faster than ever before. It is about recognizing that the future of innovation must remain anchored in the timeless values of responsibility, integrity, and service.

In convening this timely discussion on “**The State of the Nation in AI**,” the Rotary Club of Manila once again affirms its role as a platform for meaningful national dialogue. The conversation it hosts today is not merely about technology. It is about the direction of the Philippines itself. And as Rotarians gather to explore this evolving frontier, they do so with the understanding that the true measure of progress lies not in the power of our machines, but in the wisdom with which we choose to use them. ■

GUEST SPEAKER

Mark S. Gorriceta is the Managing Partner and Head of the Corporate, Banking and Finance, and Technology, Media, and Telecommunications (TMT) Groups of Gorriceta Africa Cauton & Saavedra – a multi- awarded and full-service Philippine law firm established in 2015 with offices in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

He represents domestic conglomerates in their digitization efforts as well as the Philippines' top technology companies – both local and global entities – and further renders his expertise in corporate structuring, tax, banking & finance, capital markets, equity financing, and in navigating complex cross-border commercial transactions. With over 20 years of experience in private practice, Mark has developed an extensive expertise in complex corporate transactions, commercial contracts, and regulatory matters in a range of areas that impact businesses – whether for start-ups or for Top 1000 companies in the Philippines. He is a leading lawyer in the Philippines in the fields of Capital Markets, Mergers & Acquisitions, and Securities Law. Mark has been recognized as one of the Philippines' Top 100 Lawyers for four consecutive years (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024) by the Asia Business Law Journal. With



ATTY. MARK S. GORRICETA

Corporate Secretary &
Co-Founder, GACPh

pioneering expertise on the law on digital assets, fintech, blockchain, virtual currencies, e-commerce, data privacy, and artificial intelligence, he is legal counsel to the biggest and most impactful technology and online companies in the Philippines and has been recognized as one of the Top Technology Media & Telco Lawyers in Asia and Ranked # 1 in the Philippines in the Tech/Fintech space.

A member of the Philippine Bar, Mark graduated law with honors and holds a Bachelor of Arts – Political Science degree from the Ateneo de Manila University. He completed certificate courses in Finance at the Asian Institute of Management. He attended certificates courses in Corporate Finance at Harvard University. He also completed several Masterclasses on Blockchain, Distributed Ledger & Smart Contracts in Singapore and Hong Kong. Mark is currently a faculty member of the Ateneo de Manila University's Graduate School of Business and teaches Mergers & Acquisitions for the Advanced Module Diploma Course in Corporate Finance. Mark also serves as lecturer at the Fintech and Regulatory Innovation Program of the Mapua University in collaboration with the University of Cambridge of England. ■

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr. Donald Patrick Lim stands as one of the Philippines' most accomplished and forward-looking leaders in the fields of digital transformation, business innovation, and nation-building. He currently serves as President of DITO CME Holdings Corporation, a publicly listed investment holding company with interests in telecommunications, media, and technology, including DITO Telecommunity. He is also the President of the Management Association of the Philippines for 2026.

Over the past two decades, Dr. Lim has held key leadership roles across multiple industries — media, advertising, telecommunications, and digital — making him one of the few executives with deep, cross-sector expertise. He previously served as Country CEO of Dentsu Aegis Philippines, Chief Digital Officer of ABS-CBN Corporation, Managing Director of MRM Manila, and CEO of Yehey Corporation and Media Contacts Manila. Across these positions, he helped shape the evolution of the Philippine digital economy and mentored a new generation of marketing and technology professionals.



DR. DONALD PATRICK LIM

Chairman & Founder
GACPH

Recognizing the need for national collaboration in emerging technologies, Dr. Lim founded the Blockchain Council of the Philippines and the Cybersecurity Council of the Philippines, and he is the Trustee and Board Chair of the Global AI Council Philippines. These organizations unite government, industry, and academe to build digital trust, advance innovation, and prepare the Philippines for the challenges of an AI-driven and blockchain-enabled future. His leadership has made him a central figure in the country's efforts to establish governance frameworks and ethical standards in the digital age.

Beyond his corporate and advocacy work, Dr. Lim is a respected educator, researcher, and thought leader. He has taught in leading universities, including the University of Asia and the Pacific, De La Salle University, San Beda University, and Enderun Colleges, where he currently teaches courses on Blockchain and Artificial Intelligence. He has also been an adjunct professor at the Asian Institute of Management and Bradford University in the United Kingdom. ■

GUEST SPEAKER

Catherine Denise “Catz” Jalandoni is a leading voice in ethical AI, digital governance, and inclusive innovation—shaping conversations that bridge technology, policy, and social impact across borders.

As President of the Global AI Council Philippines, she advances responsible AI adoption while positioning the Philippines within global dialogues on artificial intelligence, fintech, and emerging technologies.

Catz also serves as the President of the Global AI Council Philippines and the Institute of Corporate Directors Philippines, where she champions leadership excellence, corporate responsibility, and future-ready governance. Through CSJ Events Management, she leads advocacy-driven initiatives that convene government, industry, and civil society around transformative ideas and policy-aligned innovation.



CATHERINE S. JALANDONI

Founder & President
GACPh

A passionate advocate for women’s leadership in technology, Catz consistently amplifies the role of women in shaping ethical, inclusive, and people-centered digital futures. Her work emphasizes the importance of governance frameworks that ensure AI and fintech innovations expand opportunity, protect trust, and deliver real social value.

Beyond her professional leadership, Catz brings a deeply human lens to innovation. As a mother of five and a recognized thought leader in AI and digital transformation, she inspires others—especially women—to take space, own their expertise, and lead with conviction. Her leadership reflects a powerful blend of policy insight, entrepreneurial drive, and values-based advocacy, ensuring that technology serves not just markets, but people and communities worldwide. ■

MODERATOR

Mr. Antonilo "Anton" DC. Mauricio, the lead author of the Philippine AI Report 2026 (PAIR), is a distinguished leader in finance and digital transformation with over 33 years of experience in investment and strategy.

A graduate of the University of the Philippines Diliman and Singapore Management University, he has held significant leadership roles, including serving as the Undersecretary of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the General Manager of the National Development Company (NDC). During his tenure at the NDC, he founded the Philippine Innovation Hub (iHub) and chaired the Startup Venture Fund (SVF), focusing on building a robust ecosystem for national innovation. Currently, he serves as the Chairman and Founder of InnovationPH and InnovationASIA, and is a Co-Founder, Trustee, and Treasurer of the Global AI Council Philippines (GACPh).



ANTONIOLO DC. MAURICIO

Chairman & Founder
InnovationPH

Recognized for his contributions to the technology landscape, he was named the Asian Hero for Innovation & Sustainability and the Man of the Year for Innovation in 2024. Through his work on the SONAI and PAIR initiatives, Mr. Mauricio has become a pivotal figure in establishing a "single source of truth" for AI in the Philippines, advocating for sovereign AI solutions and the immediate implementation of ethics and governance to future-proof the nation. He underscores the urgent need for the Philippines to accelerate its AI development. Recognizing AI as the most pervasive technology today, the presentation argues that the nation must pivot from a simple "catch-up" strategy to one of "remediation" to address significant gaps in infrastructure and policy. ■

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

My Kuya Edgard

IN Rotary, we often speak of fellowship as one of the quiet yet enduring gifts of membership. We may first come together as colleagues and professionals, but over time those associations deepen into something far more meaningful -- friendships forged through shared ideals, companionship in service, and a sense of brotherhood grounded in a common calling. It is in that spirit of fellowship that we remember today our fellow Manila Rotarian, Edgard Cabangon.



Raoul C. Creencia
President

Edgard and I called each other “Kuya,” a simple yet warm term of endearment that reflected the easy familiarity between us. While we were not particularly close, there was a quiet friendship that existed between us. I had known his late father—the good Ambassador—and would occasionally attend his birthday celebrations and other gatherings where I would see Kuya Edgard.

Through Rotary, I would later have the opportunity to know my Kuya better.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Kuya Edgard lived a life that spoke eloquently of perseverance and resolve. Through determination and hard work, he continued to build and expand the various family businesses entrusted to him. Yet those who encountered him within the fellowship of the Rotary Club of Manila knew that his accomplishments in business were only one dimension of who he was. What distinguished him most was not merely the success he achieved, but the character with which he carried it.

There was something unmistakably authentic about Kuya Edgard. He was proud of his journey and of the values that had guided him along the way. But that pride was never accompanied by arrogance. Rather, it was the quiet confidence of a man who had worked hard, overcome challenges, and earned the right to stand where he stood.

Within our Rotary meetings and gatherings, Kuya Edgard was a familiar and reassuring presence. During the times when he was able to personally attend, he did not simply show up -- he participated with sincerity and warmth. Whether during a luncheon or a simple conversation among friends, one could sense that he genuinely valued the fellowship that Rotary nurtures.

The Rotary Club of Manila, after all, is a rare space in our world -- where accomplished men gather not to compete with one another, but to serve together.

Kuya Edgard understood that deeply. He recognized that the true measure of success is not found in wealth or recognition alone, but in the difference



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

one makes in the lives of others. In that sense, his life reflected one of the enduring ideals we hold dear in Rotary: Service Above Self.

On a more personal note, I will always remember Kuya Edgard's kindness and generosity in our own interactions. Even while he was already undergoing treatment, he continued to respond to my requests for media coverage of the various activities of the Club and of the District. That quiet willingness to support Rotary -- even while facing personal challenges -- spoke volumes about his commitment to the fellowship we share.

I also remember the welcoming smile he carried whenever our paths crossed. It was a simple gesture, yet one that conveyed warmth and goodwill -- qualities that often say more about a person than any formal achievement.

Kuya Edgard's generosity likewise extended in ways that I personally experienced. He graciously sponsored a newspaper spread featuring my induction as RCM President, a gesture that I deeply appreciated and will always remember. Despite his failing health, he also made sure that his news crew continued covering the Club's activities and that these were featured in the press.

Regrettably, I must also admit a personal sadness -- that I never had the opportunity to visit him in the hospital. It is one of those small regrets that reminds us how quickly time passes, and how important it is to cherish the presence of our friends while we still have the chance.

Indeed, the Rotary ideal is often expressed not in grand pronouncements, but in the quiet consistency with which a person lives. Kuya Edgard embodied that quiet consistency. He worked hard, built much, and in his own way contributed to the greater good. Through it all, he remained connected to the fellowship that binds us together as Rotarians.

For those of us privileged to share that fellowship with him, our memories will not simply be of a businessman or a civic leader. We will remember the man who sat beside us at the same tables, who shared in the same laughter, and who joined us in the same mission of service.

In the Rotary Club of Manila -- the oldest Rotary club in Asia -- our legacy is not defined solely by the projects we undertake or the milestones we celebrate. It is also shaped by the lives of the men who pass through our

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

fellowship, each leaving behind a part of their story, their character, and their example.

Kuya Edgard's story is now part of that legacy.

As we remember him today, we do so with gratitude -- for his friendship, for his presence among us, and for the inspiration of a life lived with determination and purpose. Though he may no longer sit beside us in fellowship, the memory of our brother Rotarian remains woven into the shared history of this Club and into the hearts of those who knew him.

May we honor that memory by continuing the work that Rotary calls us to do: to serve with integrity, to lead with humility, and to nurture the fellowship that gives meaning to our journey.

And so today we say not only farewell, but also thank you -- to our brother in Rotary, Edgard Cabangon. His life reminds us that success finds its deepest meaning when it is accompanied by generosity, humility, and service to others.

May he rest in peace, and may his legacy continue to inspire us all. ■



Photos taken during Rotarian Edgard Cabangon's 61st birthday celebration on April 9, 2025.



cover story

At the Crossroads of Sovereignty and Truth

The Rotary Club of Manila's 23rd Weekly Membership Meeting

by PE Reginald T. Yu

AT 12:30 PM, beneath the stately chandeliers and quiet elegance of the Manila Polo Club, President **Raoul C. Creencia** called the 23rd Weekly Membership Meeting of the Rotary Club of Manila to order. It was a gathering that felt both familiar and consequential — a convergence of fellowship and public discourse that has long defined the traditions of Asia's first Rotary club.

Outside, the late February sun filtered gently through the polo grounds. Inside, the room was filled with the steady hum of conversation among Rotarians, guests, and visiting dignitaries. The Rotary Club of Manila has always been more than a venue for luncheon meetings; it has served for more than a century as a forum where ideas, policy, and conscience meet. This particular Thursday would prove to be no exception.

Moderating the program was STAR Rotarian **Chris C. Tamesis**, whose composed presence guided the meeting with both warmth and efficiency.

Fellowship, Reflection, and the Rotary Spirit

The meeting began with the familiar rituals that anchor Rotary gatherings across the world.

The invocation was delivered by STAR Rotarian **Francisco Roberto D. C. Mauricio**, whose prayer invited reflection on gratitude, stewardship, and the responsibility of leadership. His words carried the quiet reminder that service, in Rotary, begins with humility before it becomes action.



President Raoul C. Creencia called the 23rd Weekly Membership Meeting of the Rotary Club of Manila to order.



STAR Rotarian Chris C. Tamesis moderated the meeting.



STAR Rotarian Francisco Roberto D. C. Mauricio led the invocation.



Vice President Karlo Eugene Josef M. Castro led the recitation of the Four-Way Test.

Members rose for the Philippine National Anthem, followed by the stirring strains of the Rotary Club of Manila Hymn, performed by the **RCM World-Famous Music Chorale**. Their voices echoed through the hall with a tone of pride and camaraderie, reinforcing the shared identity that binds generations of Rotarians.

The recitation of The Four-Way Test was led by Vice President **Karlo Eugene Josef M. Castro**, whose clear cadence reminded those present of Rotary's enduring ethical compass:

Of the things we think, say, or do:

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

These words — simple yet profound —continue to guide Rotarians across continents and cultures.

Guests were warmly acknowledged by Moderator Chris Tamesis, reflecting Rotary's longstanding tradition of hospitality. The RCM World-Famous Music Chorale returned with a spirited Welcome Song, setting a tone of celebration for the afternoon.

The meeting also honored several birthday celebrants, including STAR Rotarian Coco Mauricio, Rotarian Raji Mendoza, Past Vice President Fausto Preysler, and Rotarian Jonas Gonzales. The traditional rendition of Maligayang Bati / Happy Birthday added a lighthearted moment to the proceedings.

President's Time: Stewardship of a Living Institution

During President's Time, President **Raoul Creencia** addressed the membership with a tone that balanced optimism and vigilance.



President Raoul Creencia addressed the membership with a balance of optimism and vigilance during President's Time.

Rotary clubs, he noted, must continually adapt to a rapidly shifting world — one defined by geopolitical tensions, technological disruption, and evolving civic responsibilities.

The Rotary Club of Manila, founded in 1919, has witnessed nearly every chapter of modern Philippine history: colonial transition, independence, war, reconstruction, and democratic renewal. Through each era, the club has sought to remain both a moral compass and a convening force for dialogue.

This meeting would soon remind everyone present why such dialogue matters.



Director-Elect Carlos G. Serapio introduced the guest speaker, Mr. David Nye.

Introducing the Voice of the Afternoon

The afternoon's guest speaker was introduced by Director-Elect **Carlos G. Serapio**, whose introduction captured both the professional stature and intellectual courage of the guest.

The speaker, Mr. **David Nye**, is a former Foreign News Editor of *The Global Times* in Beijing, China, a journalist whose career has placed him at the crossroads of international politics, media narratives, and the evolving power dynamics of the 21st century.



Guest speaker Mr. David Nye, a former Foreign News Editor of The Global Times in Beijing, China

His address carried a title that immediately signaled the gravity of the discussion ahead:

“Narratives and National Interest: The Philippines in an Era of Global Influence.”

What followed was not merely a speech. It was a sobering reflection on the complex battlefield where geopolitics, propaganda, and national identity now intersect.

Narratives, Sovereignty, and the Invisible Battlefield

Mr. Nye began with a vivid image that set the tone for the entire address:

the Philippines standing at a crossroads where the salt spray of the West Philippine Sea meets the silent digital currents of psychological warfare.

In his telling, the conflict surrounding the West Philippine Sea is not simply a territorial dispute. It is a layered struggle unfolding simultaneously across physical, informational, and psychological domains.

He described two parallel fronts confronting the Philippines.

The first is visible: maritime confrontations, gray-zone tactics, and acts of intimidation in contested waters.

The second is invisible: a war of narratives unfolding in media platforms, social networks, and public discourse.

The danger, he argued, is that nations can lose the second war long before the first one is fought.

Gray Zone Tactics and the Strategy of Pressure

According to Nye, the maritime actions of the People’s Republic of

China in the West Philippine Sea illustrate what strategic scholars call “gray zone tactics.”

These are actions carefully calibrated to remain below the threshold of open warfare, yet sufficiently aggressive to achieve strategic goals.

Among the examples he cited were:

- harassment of Filipino fishermen
- environmental destruction of coral reefs
- water cannon attacks on Philippine resupply missions
- maritime intimidation by large coast guard vessels

These acts, he emphasized, are not isolated incidents.

They are components of a strategy designed to normalize encroachment and slowly reshape international perception of ownership.

The ultimate objective is not necessarily to win a dramatic confrontation — but to create a new status quo.

The Psychological Objective

Yet Nye stressed that the physical confrontations at sea serve a deeper purpose.

Their real function is psychological.

Repeated intimidation is designed to produce a sense of helplessness — a narrative that a smaller nation cannot stand against a superpower.

This is where the second front of the conflict emerges: information warfare.

He described how propaganda networks attempt to frame the issue as a stark choice:

“Submission or War.”

In this false narrative, any defense of Philippine sovereignty is portrayed as reckless warmongering, while surrender is rebranded as “pragmatic peace.”

Such framing, he explained, is a classic psychological tactic intended to divide public opinion and paralyze policy decisions.

The Role of Disinformation

Nye warned that the battlefield of influence has expanded dramatically in the digital age.

Through networks of online trolls, coordinated messaging campaigns, and sympathetic influencers,

narratives can be amplified with astonishing speed.

These campaigns often promote defeatist rhetoric, question the legitimacy of Philippine defense policies, and portray foreign dominance as inevitable.

By repeating such messages frequently enough, the objective is to reshape public perception.

But the antidote, Nye argued, lies in transparency.

He praised the Philippine government's strategy of inviting journalists to accompany maritime patrols and document confrontations at sea.

When the world sees video footage of water cannons or aggressive maneuvers, propaganda loses its power.

"Light," he said, "is the most effective disinfectant against disinformation."

The Challenge of Internal Vulnerability

Perhaps the most uncomfortable part of Nye's speech addressed the issue of internal complicity.

He spoke candidly about what intelligence experts call a "Fifth

He praised the Philippine government's strategy of inviting journalists to accompany maritime patrols and document confrontations at sea.

Column"—individuals or institutions within a country that inadvertently or deliberately advance the interests of a foreign power.

Such influence can manifest through political lobbying, economic incentives, and strategic investments designed to shape decision-making at multiple levels of government.

Nye warned that influence operations often target local political structures, where financial incentives can create pockets of support that undermine national policy.

He also referenced the complex role of Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs), which in some cases facilitated flows of unregulated capital and the presence of foreign actors operating outside Philippine regulatory oversight.

These developments, he suggested, highlight the need for vigilance in protecting strategic sectors such as telecommunications, infrastructure, and energy.

Economic Independence as National Defense

Nye argued that sovereignty in the modern era cannot rely solely on military strength.

Economic resilience, he said, is equally critical.

The Philippines must continue expanding trade partnerships with countries that respect international law and territorial sovereignty — including Japan, Australia, the European Union, and fellow ASEAN members.

When a nation's economy depends excessively on a single partner, that dependency can become a geopolitical lever.

True independence requires diversified partnerships.

Asymmetric Defense

From a strategic standpoint, Nye emphasized the importance of asymmetric defense capabilities.

Rather than attempting to match the

naval strength of a much larger power, smaller states can develop systems designed to raise the cost of aggression.

These include:

- coastal defense systems
- drone surveillance
- cyber-security infrastructure
- intelligence coordination with allies

In such an approach, deterrence is achieved not by size but by strategic complexity.

Educating the Next Generation

A particularly compelling part of Nye's message focused on civic education.

He described the 2016 Arbitral Ruling under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as a legal milestone that affirms Philippine rights in the West Philippine Sea.

For Nye, the ruling is not simply a legal document — it is a symbol of national dignity and international law.

He urged that future generations of Filipinos must understand its significance.

A nation aware of its rights, he said, is far harder to manipulate.

A Call for National Unity

Nye concluded with a message that transcended politics.

The struggle over the West Philippine Sea, he argued, should not be viewed through partisan lenses.

It is not about being “pro-American” or “pro-Chinese.”

It is about being pro-Filipino.

The ocean, he observed, does not recognize political parties. When sovereignty erodes, it erodes for every citizen.

He ended with a stirring reminder:

*The Philippines endured centuries of colonial rule.
Its people fought hard for independence.*

To surrender sovereignty now — whether through intimidation or persuasion — would betray that long struggle.

The Filipino spirit, he declared, cannot be bought.

Dialogue and Reflection

Following the address, the meeting opened into a lively Open Forum, where Rotarians engaged the speaker

with thoughtful questions about geopolitics, media narratives, and the responsibilities of democratic societies in the age of digital information warfare.

The exchange reflected the Rotary Club of Manila’s enduring role as a forum for serious civic conversation.

Mr. David Nye engaged in a Q&A session with Sec. Anton Mauricio, PD Abe Pascual, DE Caloy Serapio, PIA Jordan Pizarra, STAR Rtn. Coco Mauricio, and PVP Joel Valdes.





President Raoul Creencia presented Mr. Nye with a Certificate of Appreciation, in the presence of Sec. Antonilo D.C. "Anton" Mauricio, STAR Rtn. Chris C. Tamesis, DE Carlos G. "Caloy" Serapio, DE Delfin N. "Del" Lorenzana, VPE Karlo Eugene Josef M. "Karlo" Castro, and STAR Rtn. Francisco Roberto D.C. "Coco" Mauricio.

President **Raoul Creencia** later presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Mr. Nye in recognition of his insightful and thought-provoking address.

A Meeting that Echoes Beyond the Hall

At 2:00 PM, President Raoul formally adjourned the meeting.

Yet the ideas shared that afternoon lingered long after the final applause.

For over a century, the Rotary Club of Manila has brought together leaders not only to exchange pleasantries but to confront the questions that shape the nation's future.

On that Thursday in March, the conversation turned toward one of the defining challenges of our time:

How a nation protects not only its territory — but its truth, its sovereignty, and its sense of self in a world where power increasingly moves through narratives.



*President Raoul Creencia
adjourned the meeting.*

And as Rotarians departed the Manila Polo Club that afternoon, many carried with them a renewed awareness that defending the Philippines today requires more than ships and diplomacy.

It requires clarity of mind, courage of conviction, and unity of purpose. ■



Meeting Fellowship



RCM Members' Attendance Report
RY 2025-2026



ATTENDANCE REPORT
March 2026

MARCH 2026	March 05, 2026
	MR. DAVID NYE
MEMBERS PRESENT	34
MEMBERS PRESENT %	16%
MAKE UP ATTENDEES	6
EXEMPTED	5
ON LEAVE	0
Total Active Members	40
Total # of Members	211
TOTAL %:	19%
ROTARACTORS	17
MEDIA	0
EMBASSIES / DIPLOMATIC CORPS	0
DG, DGE, DGN, PDG	0
GOHS / GS	4
VISITING ROTARIAN	0
Guests of RCM MEMBERS	2
TOTAL ATTENDEES	57



LIST OF ATTENDEES
March 5, 2026

1	Benedicto, Sixto T.
2	Carlos, Vicente J.
3	Castro, Karlo Eugene Josef M.
4	Co, Val Constantine L.
5	Creencia, Raoul C.
6	Cureg, Alexander P.
7	Cutter, John Michael
8	Del Rosario Sr., Oscar A.
9	Egen, Brendan W.L.
10	Enriquez II, Eduardo V.
11	Esguerra, Herminio S.
12	Locsin, Arsenio Z.
13	Lonzaga, Reinerio C.
14	Lorenzana, Delfin
15	Matschuck, Guenter Gerhard G.
16	Mauricio, Antonio DC
17	Mauricio, Francisco Robert DC.
18	Nolido, Ramon Alberto B.
19	Nuñez, Jr., Jose A.
20	Pascual, Abraham F.
21	Pizarra, Jordan M.
22	Preysler, Jr., Fausto R.
23	Ra, Ingil
24	Recto, Philip H.
25	Serapio, Carlos G.
26	Sibayan, Joseito H.
27	Simon, Juanito A.
28	So, Warren S.
29	Tagaysay, Hector O.
30	Valdes, Joel C.
31	Valencia, John Nico P.
32	Yu, Reginald Tieng
33	Hiroyasu, Kanda
34	Tamesis, Chris C.
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CLUB ADMINISTRATION

List of Members Who Have Paid Their Annual Dues for RY 2025-2026

As of March 10, 2026

1	ABOY, VALENTINO G.	49	DE CASTRO, JUAN ARTURO ILUMINADO
2	ABRIAM, ARIEL	50	DEL ROSARIO, OSCAR
3	ACOSTA, CRISPINIANO G.	51	DIONISIO, RAFAEL
4	AGNES, JERRY A.	52	DOMINGO, RICO, V.
5	ALBAÑA, MICHAEL JAEY	53	DOMINGUEZ, CARLOS G.
6	ALBERTO, RAYMUND ARNOLD S.	54	DY, MANUEL
7	ALDAY, ALBERT S.	55	EGAN, BRENDAN
8	ALINGOG, ALDOUS REX A.	56	ELDEBS, ISSAM
9	ALUNAN, RAFAEL M.	57	ENRIQUEZ, EDUARDO III
10	ANDAL, AVELINO L.	58	ESGUERRA, HERMINIO S.
11	ARAGON, JOSHUA RUEBEN G.	59	ESQUIVIAS, JOAQUIN PABLO A.
12	ARAMBULO, JOAQUIN JR. L.	60	EUGENIO, JOHN EMYL G.
13	ARGUELLES, PABLO C.	61	EUGENIO, ERIC
14	AVENTURA, AVELINO JR. L.	62	FAJARDO, BEDA G.
15	BAGATSING, VALENTINO	63	FERNANDEZ, ANTONIO JAIME JOSE V.
16	BALANAY, ARIES B.	64	FOLLOSCO, CEFERINO JR. G.
17	BARTOLOME, ARSENIO III M.	65	GARCIA, HERBERT JOEY
18	BAUTISTA, JOHN JR.	66	GARCIA, PAUL JOSEPH M.
19	BEDIONES, RODOLFO P.	67	GARCIA, THEODORE Q.
20	BELLA, GERONIMO JR. D.	68	GARCIA, VICTOR III G.
21	BENEDICTO, BERNARDO III T.	69	GASPAR, FERNANDO
22	BENEDICTO, SIXTO T.	70	GINEZ, WINSTON M.
23	BERTELSEN, BERTEL INGMAR	71	GO, DANNY C.
24	BLANCO, MANUEL M.	72	GO, HENRY S.
25	BOGOVICH, JASON M.	73	GONZALES, JONAS R.
26	BOLTON, WILHELM	74	GONZALES-LA'O, EMIL
27	BRANELEC, JACQUES	75	GUARIN, MICHAEL ARCATOMY
28	BUENDIA, CARLOS	76	GUEVARA, DOMINGO JR.
29	CABANGON, EDGARD	77	GUEVARA, RICARDO S.B.
30	CABUNAG, ROGELIO	78	HALLARE, DELFIN JR.
31	CAMAT, NATHANIEL	79	HALLARE, NICOLO
32	CAMPOS, JOSELITO JR. D.	80	HARLE, WOLFGANG KURT
33	CANON, RAUL JR C.	81	HERNANDEZ, EDWIN H.
34	CARLOS, VICENTE J.	82	HESSE, UWE
35	CARRANCEJA, ARVIN ARIK B.	83	IBUYAN, BENEDICT JULIUS F.
36	CASTRO, KARLO EUGENE JOSEF M.	84	JANG, JAE JUNG
37	CATALAN, RODILLO	85	JUCABAN, JERIC J.
38	CHAHWAN, RAMI	86	KALAW, TEODORO ALEJANDRO IV Y.
39	CHAN, ROBERT JR.	87	KANDA, HIROYUSI
40	CHIEN, LIANG-TA	88	KATIGBAK J ALFONSO L
41	CID, DEAN	89	KE, ERIC CHAN
42	CO, VAL CONSTANTINE L.	90	KHO, RALPH VALENTIN
43	COYIUTO, ROBERT JR. G.	91	KLEBS, DAVID
44	CREENCIA, RAOUL C.	92	KOH, PAUL ANTHONY
45	CUREG, ALEXANDER P.	93	LACAMBACAL, ALVIN
46	CUTTER, JOHN MICHAEL	94	LAYA, JAIME C.
47	DAYANG, JUAN E.	95	LAUREL, RICARDO P.
48	DAVIS, RAYMOND N.	96	LAZARO, JUAN MIGUEL

CLUB ADMINISTRATION

List of Members Who Have Paid Their Annual Dues for RY 2025-2026

As of March 10, 2026

97	LEDDE, JAIME VICTOR B.	145	RECTO, PHILIP H.
98	LEE, RICHARD L.	146	REYNOLDS, DAVID
99	LIAMZON, ROMEO THADDEUS M.	147	RODRIGUEZ, JOAQUIN ANTHONY JR. H.
100	LIM, RICHARD	148	RODRIGUEZ, JOAQUIN SR. C.
101	LI, RICHARD JOSEPH C.	149	ROMUALDEZ, FERDINAND MARTIN G.
102	LIM, DAVID EDUARDO T.	150	ROMUALDEZ, JOSE MANUEL G.
103	LIAO, CHRISTOPHER	151	ROÑO, MARLON
104	LOCSIN, ARSENIO Z.	152	ROXAS, MICHAEL D.
105	LONZAGA, REINERIO C.	153	SARMIENTO, RICARDO MANUEL M.
106	LOPEZ, ANTONIO	154	SCHMITZ, STEFAN
107	LOPEZ, ARTHUR M.	155	SCHNEIDER, BERND
108	LORENZANA, DELFIN	156	SERAPIO, CARLOS G.
109	MACAPAGAL, MICHAEL T.	157	SEVILLA, LUIS ANGELO L.
110	MACATOMAN, ABDULGANI M.	158	SHIMODA, SHIGERU
111	MAGBANUA, GERRY P.	159	SIBAYAN, JOSELITO H.
112	MAGSAYSAY, FRANCISCO D.	160	SIMON, JUANITO AYSON
113	MANALAYSAY, CESAR P.	161	SO, WARREN
114	MANGALILE, SENEN	162	SOBREPEÑA, ROBERT JOHN
115	MARTINEZ, RONALD	163	STRANATHAN, IKE EDWARD
116	MATSCHUCK, GUENTER GERHARD G.	164	SYJUCO, JOSE, JR. A.
117	MAURICIO, ANTONILO DC	165	TAGAYSAY, HECTOR O.
118	MAURICIO, FRANCISCO ROBERTO C.	166	TALAMPAS, JOSE ANGEL L.
119	MENDOZA, MIGUEL	167	TALUSAN, FERDINAND E.
120	MENDOZA, RAYMUND JOSEPH D.	168	TAMANO, SHALIMAR H.
121	MOMMAERTS, STEVE	169	TAMAYO, VICTOR L.
122	NOLIDO, RAMON ALBERTO B.	170	TAMESIS, CHRIS
123	NOMURA, KAZUHIRO	171	TAN, EUSEBIO V.
124	NONES, ROMEO C.	172	TAN, JOHN G.
125	NUÑEZ, JOSE A.	173	TAN, LAWRENCE L.
126	OBRADO, DANIEL	174	TEE, TEDDY JR. B.
127	OCAMPO, TEODORO J.	176	TEJUMAL, MICHAEL
128	ONG, PHILIP	177	TILLMAN, HANSEL JOSEPH MICHAEL L.
129	ONG, ROWEL JANSON S.	178	VALDES, JOEL C.
130	PAGDANGANAN, ROBERTO M.	179	VALDEZ, AMADO
131	PALACIOS, ALBERT S.	180	VALDEZ, JASON ROLAND N.
132	PALLASIGUE, JOHN BRIAN C.	181	VALDERRAMA, JASON ROMEO
133	PANTALEON, OLIVER	182	VALENCIA, JOHN NICO P.
134	PASCUAL, ABRAHAM	183	VALENCIA, RODOLFO G.
135	PAYUMO, FELICITO C.	184	VAZQUEZ, EVARISTO JR.
136	PELIÑO, WILFREDO	185	VILLARICA, HENRY R.
137	PINEDA, JESUS JR. M.	186	YAP, ENRIQUE JR.
138	PINEDA, PATRICIO JR. F.	187	YORDANOV, STEFAN
139	PIZARRAS, JORDAN M.	188	YU, GEOFFREY C.
140	PREYSLER, FAUSTO JR. D.R.	189	YU, REGINALD T.
141	PUJALTE, JOSE BRITTANIO JR.	190	ZALDARRIAGA, FELIX FRANCISCO S.
142	RA, INGILL	191	ZEITOUNI, NAGI
143	RAMOS, CLAVER P.	192	ZIALCITA, XAVIER Y.
144	RANKL, PETER	193	ZIMMER, CHRISTOPHER



2026 Rotary International Convention
13-17 June 2026
Taipei, Taiwan

Rotary Zone 10A
RICON
ROTARY INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
TAIPEI, TAIWAN JUNE 13-17, 2026

Registration Category	21-25 JUNE 2025	26 JUNE TO 15 DEC 2025	16 DEC 2025 TO 31 MAR 2026	1 APRIL 2026 TO 17 JUNE 2026
Club Member, Non-Member or Guest age 31 or over	US \$395	US \$475	US \$575	US \$675
Club Member, Non-Member or Guest age 19 to 30	US \$150	US \$175	US \$225	US \$275
Guest age 5 to 18	US \$20	US \$20	US \$30	US \$40
Guest under age 5	FREE	FREE	FREE	FREE
Saturday House of Friendship Only	US \$60	US \$60	US \$60	US \$100



Sta. Elena Golf Club
JUNE 22, 2026 (MONDAY)

REGISTRATION: 6:00AM
SHOTGUN TEE-OFF: 8:00AM

TOURNAMENT FEE
PHP 9,000.00

**Green Fee, Cart-sharing, Giveaways,
Breakfast, Lunch & Raffles**

**FOR THE BENEFIT OF RCM AND
RCMFI PROJECTS**



SPONSORS

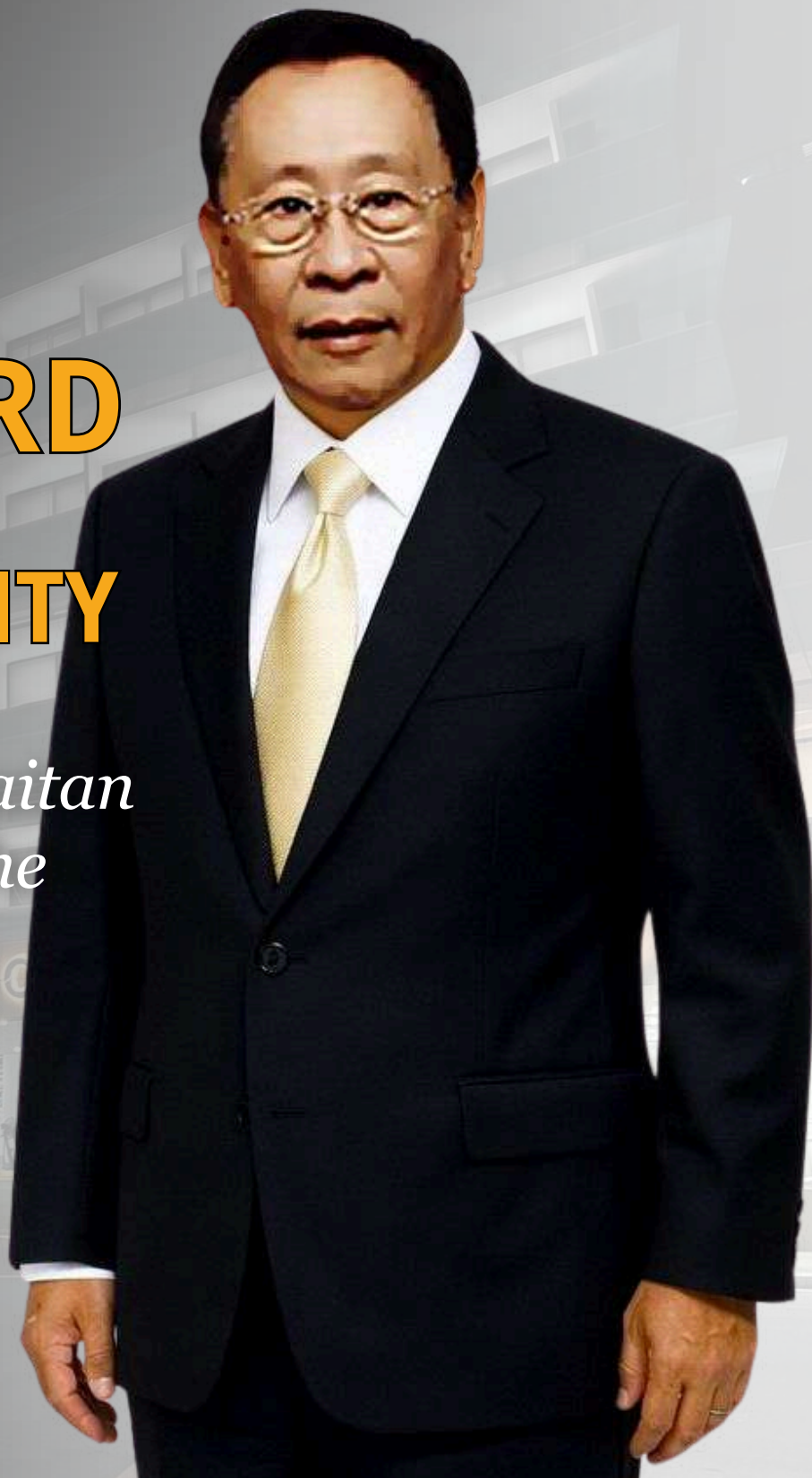
A golfer in a blue shirt and cap is captured mid-swing, positioned behind the word "SPONSORS". To the right of the word is a graphic of a golf ball with a green and white striped flag.

PEOPLE

STEWARD *of* CONTINUITY

*Alberto Gatmaitan
Romulo and the
Discipline of
Public Service*

By PE Reginald T. Yu



STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

ALBERTO Gatmaitan Romulo entered public life late and left it quietly. In between, he occupied some of the highest offices of the Philippine state — not as a performer of authority, but as its steward. Trained by institutions long before he led them, shaped by restraint rather than ambition, Romulo's life offers a rare study in how power can be exercised without noise, how service can endure without ownership, and how leadership, at its best, leaves things stronger than it found them.

This is the story of a man who believed that institutions matter more than individuals — and lived his life accordingly.



Bert, as Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), meeting Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on January 18, 2007 — a moment underscoring ASEAN's engagement with the United Nations and the Philippines' active leadership in regional and global diplomacy.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

Character is revealed not in moments of triumph, but in moments when power could be used — and is not.

There are people who enter a room and immediately announce themselves. Their presence fills the space, their authority made visible through volume, posture, or command. Alberto “Bert” Gatmaitan Romulo was not one of them. Those who met him for the first time often found themselves recalibrating their expectations. The authority came later — sometimes only after conversation had already begun.

Bert spoke carefully. He listened longer than most. He rarely interrupted. When he disagreed, he did so without edge or spectacle, as though disagreement itself were not an act of combat but an invitation to think more precisely. This was not hesitation. It was discipline. Restraint, for Bert, was not a personality trait. It was a habit.

Late one night, years ago, a stranger entered his home uninvited. The situation was inherently volatile: a private space breached, children sleeping upstairs, the ever-present possibility of fear escalating into violence. Yet when Bert encountered the intruder, there was no eruption. No assertion of dominance. No performance of authority.

There was only composure.

He greeted the man. Asked him to leave. Walked him out. Then returned upstairs to check on his children before resuming sleep. The incident ended not with confrontation, but with quiet closure.

The story spread not because of danger averted, but because of the manner in which it was done. It unsettled people. It challenged assumptions. Was this courage? Was it confidence? Or was it something rarer — a temperament trained to refuse escalation even when escalation was justified?

Bert never offered an explanation. He never told the story himself. That, too, was characteristic.

Those who worked with Bert over the years observed the same pattern in less dramatic settings. Meetings that could have turned adversarial did not. Conflicts that invited theatrical posturing were met instead with questions. Decisions were framed not as victories to be claimed, but as consequences to be weighed.

He seemed instinctively resistant to the intoxication of authority. Where others experienced power as permission — to speak louder, to dominate, to impose — Bert experienced it as **constraint**. The higher the office, the narrower the

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

margin for error. The greater the responsibility, the greater the need for self-control.

This inversion puzzled some. In political environments that reward assertion, Bert's refusal to dramatize himself could be mistaken for passivity. It never was. Those who tested him learned quickly that restraint did not mean softness. It meant that when he finally spoke, he had already done the work others rushed past.

Bert believed that power, once displayed, diminished. Authority, once flaunted, weakened. Influence, to endure, had to be exercised sparingly.

He distrusted impulse. He distrusted moral grandstanding. He distrusted certainty that arrived too quickly. Instead, he cultivated preparation — intellectual, emotional, and ethical. Decisions, he believed, should feel inevitable only **after** they had been thoroughly questioned.

This discipline made him reliable in moments when institutions faltered. When tempers flared, he cooled the room. When consensus fractured, he rebuilt process. When others sought cover, he sought clarity.

It was not that he avoided conflict. It was that he refused to let conflict define him.

In an age increasingly shaped by noise, Bert's manner can seem almost anomalous. Yet it was precisely this quality — this refusal to weaponize power — that would place him, again and again, at the center of events where steadiness mattered more than spectacle.



Bert welcomed by Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the latter's office in the United Nations Headquarters on September 28, 2004 — a moment reflecting the Philippines' active engagement with the international community at the highest level of global governance.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

Before the titles, before the offices, before the public record, there was already a governing principle at work: **power exists not to be displayed, but to be held.**

The chapters that follow trace how that principle was formed, tested, and applied across a lifetime of public service. But at its core, the story begins here — not with position, but with temperament.

Not with ambition, but with restraint.

Formation: The Making of Discipline

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo was born on **August 7, 1933**, in the town of **Camiling, Tarlac**, when the Philippines itself was still learning the discipline of independence. The nation was young, its institutions newly formed, its ambitions tempered by uncertainty. In the provinces, life moved at a deliberate pace. Seasons mattered more than slogans. Reputation was something earned slowly, and once lost, rarely recovered.

Camiling offered no appetite for excess. It was a place that rewarded steadiness and distrusted display. In such towns, one learned early that attention was not something to seek, but something to deserve.

Bert grew up in a household that



Bert, at around two years of age, is seen being carried by his maternal grandfather, Victorino Lumagi Gatmaitan (1891–1957), positioned at the far right of the photograph. A figure of quiet presence and familial strength, Gatmaitan would play an influential role in Bert's early life, embodying the intergenerational bonds that shaped his upbringing and sense of identity.

reflected those values. His father, **Gilberto Peña Romulo**, and his mother, **María Asuncion Buendia Gatmaitan**, came from Pangasinan and Pampanga — regions shaped by work ethic, thrift, and a quiet sense of obligation. Authority in the Romulo home did not announce itself. It was assumed. Expectations were conveyed without flourish. Words were used sparingly, and precisely.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service



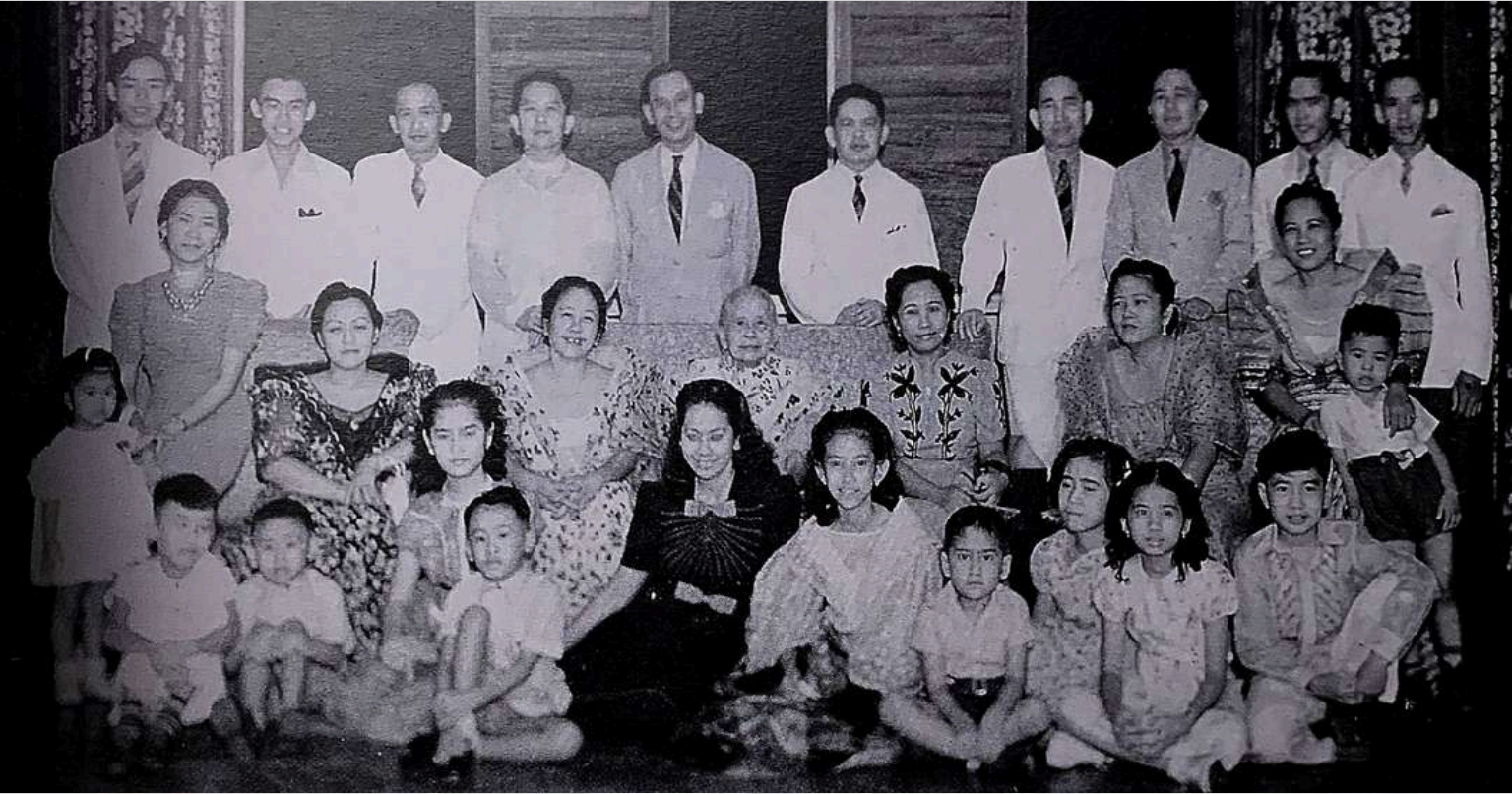
Don Gregorio Romulo (1865–1921), the grandfather of Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo, belonged to a generation of Filipino leaders who helped shape local governance during the formative years of the American period. He served as Mayor of Camiling, Tarlac, in 1901, and later as Governor of Tarlac from 1910 to 1914, earning a reputation for steady leadership and public trust at a time of profound political transition.

Born in Dagupan, Pangasinan, to Don Alberto Romulo and Doña Juana Besacruz, Don Gregorio received his formal education at Colegio de San Juan de Letran, one of the country's most venerable institutions of learning. His life reflected the values of education, public service, and civic responsibility — values that would echo across generations. Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo, affectionately known as "Bert," was later named in honor of his great-grandfather, a quiet testament to this enduring family legacy.

His wife, Doña Maria Peña de Romulo (1869–1948) — Bert's grandmother— was born to Angelo Peña and Ines Cabrera. The couple were married on July 15, 1894, forming a union that anchored the Romulo family through decades of social and political change. Together, Don Gregorio and Doña Maria laid the foundations of a lineage distinguished by public service, intellectual pursuit, and national contribution.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service



The Romulo family gathered to celebrate the 73rd birthday of Doña Maria Peña de Romulo, marking a moment of familial unity and quiet festivity. The photograph was taken on September 1, 1940, at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Rivera Kipping in Camiling, Tarlac, capturing several generations bound by kinship, memory, and shared history during a period just before the upheavals of the Second World War.

In that environment, self-control was not framed as discipline imposed from above, but as respect extended outward — to parents, to elders, to the order of things. Restraint was learned not through reprimand, but through example.

Even as a child, Bert displayed a

preference for order. He was observant rather than demonstrative, attentive rather than impulsive. Teachers noticed that he listened intently, often longer than others, and spoke only after forming his thoughts. When he did speak, it was rarely to impress. More often, it was to clarify.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

Precision mattered to him early — not as perfectionism, but as fairness to the truth.

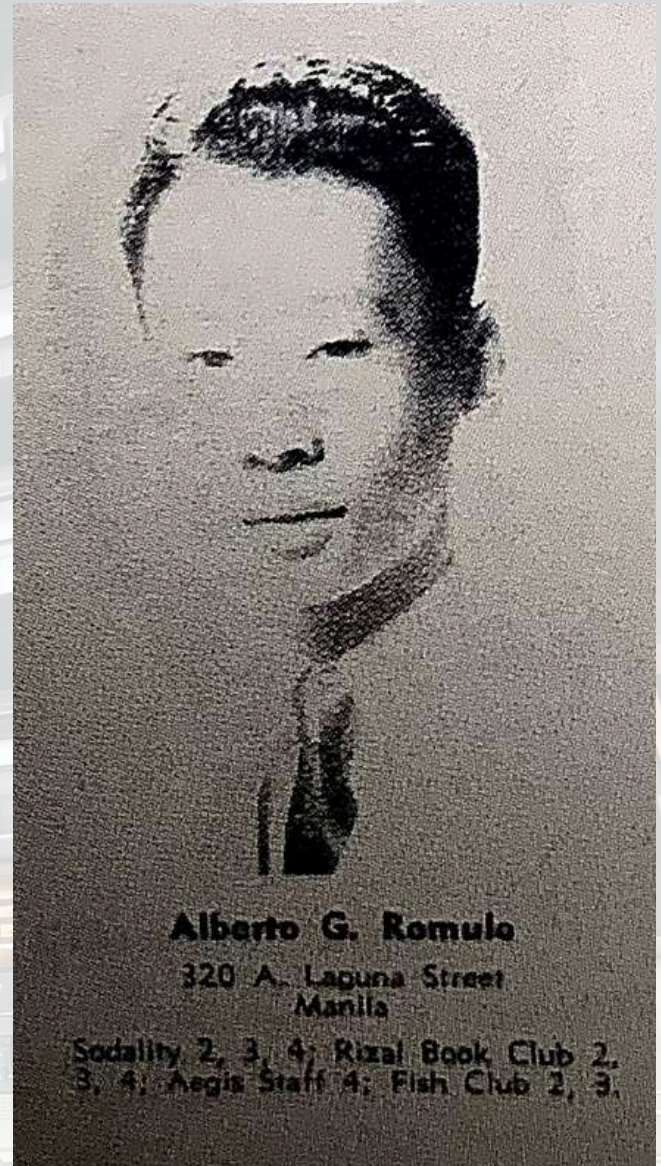
By the late **1940s**, Bert was a student at **Ateneo de Manila**, entering adolescence at a school that demanded not only intellect, but conscience. The Jesuit formation emphasized reflection before action, judgment before assertion. Excellence carried responsibility; brilliance without ethics was incomplete.

Bert thrived in this environment not because he sought distinction, but because it aligned with habits already forming. He questioned assumptions. He resisted easy conclusions. He learned to pause — not as hesitation, but as method.

At Ateneo, authority was earned through preparation. That lesson stayed with him.

Upon graduating with **First Honors** in 1950, Bert made a choice that surprised some of his peers. He did not turn immediately toward law, philosophy, or public life. Instead, he chose numbers.

At **De La Salle University**, he pursued commerce, majoring in accounting. The discipline offered no refuge for rhetoric. Balances had to reconcile. Every figure demanded explanation. Optimism unsupported by evidence was not inspirational — it was wrong.



Bert completed his secondary education at Ateneo de Manila in 1950, graduating as a first-honor student, a distinction that reflected his early academic excellence and foreshadowed a lifelong commitment to scholarship, discipline, and public service.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

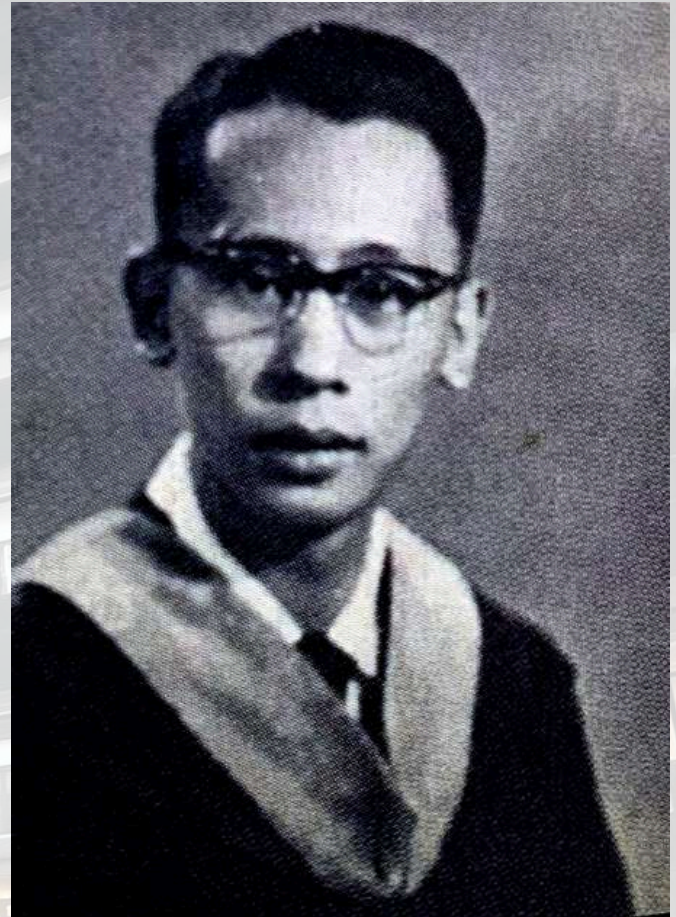
He graduated as **Salutatorian**, *cum laude*, in 1954, not through flourish, but through consistency.

Accounting taught Bert something enduring: that **every decision carries a cost**, and that costs deferred do not disappear — they accumulate. Long before he would encounter national budgets or public finance, he had already absorbed its first rule: discipline is not the enemy of compassion; it is its prerequisite.

Only after mastering limits did Bert turn to law.

In his **early twenties**, at **Manuel L. Quezon University**, he encountered legal reasoning not as combat, but as structure. Law, he came to understand, was not primarily about winning arguments. It was about designing frameworks strong enough to withstand disagreement without collapse.

Rules mattered because they were shared. Authority mattered because it was restrained. Properly understood, law did not impose order through fear; it sustained it through consent. Bert absorbed this quietly. He did not approach law as a stage for performance, but as a discipline of design — an architecture within which human conflict could be contained, managed, and resolved. He received his law degree in 1959.



Bert graduated in 1954 from De La Salle College as salutatorian of his class, cum laude, earning a Bachelor of Science in Commerce degree, major in Accounting. His academic distinction and leadership during his student years would later be echoed in his professional and public life. Five decades later, in 2004, his alma mater recognized these enduring contributions by naming him a Distinguished La Sallian Awardee, an honor conferred by the De La Salle Alumni Association in acknowledgment of his achievements and service beyond the campus.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

By the **early sixties**, his intellectual formation carried him farther still. In **Madrid**, at the **Universidad de Madrid**, Bert pursued advanced legal studies and earned his **Doctor of Laws** degree in 1962, with the distinction *sobresaliente*, the university's highest honor.

Madrid offered more than academic achievement. It offered distance.

From Europe, Bert learned to see the Philippines not only as a place of immediate concern, but as part of a longer historical arc. European legal traditions emphasized continuity over rupture, precedent over impulse. Institutions endured precisely because they resisted haste.

For a young Filipino scholar, the lesson was clarifying: progress did not require constant disruption. Often, it required patience.

Living abroad sharpened his sense of proportion. He learned that legitimacy accumulates slowly and dissolves quickly. That authority, once abused, is difficult to restore. That institutions, not personalities, carry societies forward.

By early adulthood, Bert had achieved something unusual but revealing. He

was both a **Certified Public Accountant** and a **member of the Philippine Bar** — trained in precision and structure, in limits and systems. The pairing was not accidental. Accounting taught him restraint. Law taught him design.



In 1960, on a *Tabacalera* scholarship, Bert embarked on doctoral studies in law at the *Facultad de Derecho, Ciudad Universitaria* in Madrid, where he distinguished himself academically, graduating in 1962 with a Doctor of Law degree, *sobresaliente*, from the University of Madrid. Upon his return to Manila, he entered public service as a legal assistant to Chief Justice Cesar Bengzon, gaining early exposure to the country's highest judicial institution and further honing the legal discipline that would define much of his professional life.

STEWARD OF CONTINUITY

Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

Together, they shaped a mind wary of shortcuts and deeply suspicious of solutions that promised speed without durability.

Those close to him noticed his temperament even then. He did not rush decisions. He did not escalate disagreements. When challenged, he paused, gathered facts, and weighed consequences. Silence, when used deliberately, became persuasive.

This was not indecision.

It was preparation.

By **1956**, Bert had not yet entered organized civic leadership, much less public office. But the essentials were already in place. The discipline of restraint — intellectual, emotional, ethical — had been forged quietly over more than two decades.

The world had not yet tested him.

That would come next.

Civic Awakening: Learning Leadership Among Equals

By the early **1960s**, Bert had returned to the Philippines intellectually complete but civically untested. He was in his late twenties — credentialed, trained, and deeply formed — yet still



While pursuing his studies in Madrid in 1960, Bert had a brief but memorable brush with cinema, appearing as one of the Asian extras in the epic film 55 Days at Peking. The production starred Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, and David Niven, and was filmed in Spain at the height of Hollywood's grand historical spectacles. Though incidental, the experience added an unusual and colorful footnote to Bert's formative years abroad, reflecting the breadth of experiences that shaped his time in Europe.

standing just outside the arena where character meets consequence. He had learned how systems worked. What he had not yet learned was how people did.

That lesson would come not from government, but from civic life.

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Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo and the Discipline of Public Service

The invitation arrived casually, almost unceremoniously. A friend — **Albert del Rosario** — asked Bert to join the **Manila Jaycees**. It was the sort of organization that rarely makes headlines but often makes leaders: young professionals committed to service, debate, and action, bound not by ideology but by shared responsibility.

Bert accepted without fanfare. He did not see it as a step toward anything larger. At the time, it was simply a place where men of similar age and ability gathered to do useful work.

What he encountered instead was his first rehearsal for public life.

The Jaycees operated on a principle unfamiliar to many who would later hold office: **authority was temporary, accountability immediate, and ego quickly exposed**. There were no permanent titles, no inherited prestige. Leadership rotated. Decisions were debated openly. Influence had to be earned anew each year.

For Bert, this environment proved instructive.

He was not the most forceful voice in the room. He did not dominate discussions. Instead, he listened — often longer than others — and spoke with care. When disagreements arose,

he showed an instinctive resistance to escalation. He asked clarifying questions. He sought consensus not through compromise of principle, but through precision of argument.

It did not go unnoticed.

Within his first year, Bert was invited onto a leadership slate. In an election led by **Albert del Rosario**, he was chosen as one of the directors alongside **Sonny Belmonte, Ting Bengzon, and Ronnie Buencamino**. Del Rosario himself was elected president by acclamation in 1969.

For Bert, the election mattered less than the process. This was leadership without entitlement. Authority conferred not by age or pedigree, but by trust.

It would shape how he understood power from that point forward.

The Jaycees were not a rehearsal for politics in the narrow sense. They were something more demanding: a test of temperament. Meetings were long. Opinions varied. Consensus was difficult. There were no staff to shield leaders from criticism, no protocol to mask disagreement.

Bert discovered that his instinct for restraint — honed in classrooms and libraries — translated unexpectedly well

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into civic life. Where others grew impatient, he slowed the discussion. Where tempers flared, he softened tone without diluting substance. He did not seek to win arguments. He sought to make decisions durable.

This made him dependable.

Colleagues began turning to him not in moments of celebration, but in moments of uncertainty. When discussions stalled, he was asked to clarify options. When disagreements hardened, he was asked to reframe the question. He became, quietly, a stabilizing presence.

It was here — among peers, not superiors — that Bert first learned the subtle difference between **authority and trust**.

Looking back years later, Bert would describe this period with characteristic understatement. He did not present it as destiny unfolding, nor as ambition awakening. But he acknowledged its significance.

The Jaycees introduced him to something he had not yet encountered: **the mechanics of collective decision-making**. The reality that leadership was not about personal conviction alone, but about persuading others to share responsibility for an outcome.



Pre-wedding photograph of Bert and Lovely Romulo. During the Semana Filipina Celebration in Madrid, Bert met his future wife, Rosie Lovely Tecson, at the Colegio Mayor de Guadalupe. Lovely was then in Spain to trace the journey and movements of her maternal grandfather, Dr. Pio Valenzuela, the noted revolutionary, physician, and close associate of Andres Bonifacio — an intellectual and personal pilgrimage that would unexpectedly lead to a lifelong partnership.

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It was also his first exposure to public scrutiny — not from voters or media, but from equals who were unafraid to challenge him.

That experience proved formative.

Twenty-three years later, during a celebration marking Albert del Rosario's sixtieth birthday, Bert would recall how that early invitation into civic life altered his trajectory. It was during that gathering that he thanked del Rosario not only for friendship, but for opening a door he had not known he was approaching.

When Bert later won his first electoral contest, del Rosario was the first to congratulate him.

But that moment lay far in the future.

By **1964**, Bert's participation in civic life had done something subtle but irreversible. It had shifted his understanding of responsibility. Public service was no longer abstract. It was personal. It involved disagreement, compromise, persistence, and restraint practiced under pressure.

He did not yet seek office. He did not yet speak of governance. But the habits required for both were quietly taking root.

The Jaycees did not give Bert ambition.

They gave him rehearsal.



Bert and Lovely were married on June 29, 1963, in a solemn ceremony held at San Agustin Church in Intramuros. Set within the centuries-old walls of Manila's historic core, the wedding joined two families whose shared respect for history, scholarship, and public service would continue to shape their life together.

Work Without Applause

By this time, Bert had already acquired something rare for a man barely past thirty: a reputation for reliability without spectacle. He was not yet visible to the electorate, but he was known in institutions that valued discretion — corporate boards, policy circles, professional associations, and civic networks where competence mattered more than visibility.

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This was not accidental. Bert's life after Spain unfolded not as a straight ascent, but as a deliberate accumulation of responsibility.

He worked first where precision was unforgiving. In the **late 1950s and early 1960s**, as a cost accountant for the Container Corporation of America in Los Angeles, Bert learned how decisions reverberated across balance sheets. Numbers allowed no rhetoric. They revealed truth without emotion. The discipline stayed with him.

Back in the Philippines, he entered legal and corporate service quietly. In **1959**, he began working closely with Justice César Bengzon, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, serving as his assistant secretary. Bengzon was not merely a jurist; he was a moral benchmark — so austere in integrity that even proximity demanded discipline. Bert absorbed this ethic without commentary or imitation. It became internal.

From there, his career progressed not through ambition but through trust. In the **early 1960s**, he served as Executive Committee Secretary at Elizalde & Company, then as Comptroller of Samar Mining, Inc. These were not headline positions. They were stabilizing ones. Colleagues noted that Bert did not dominate meetings. He clarified them. When others argued, he reconciled. When decisions stalled, he structured a way forward.



The newlyweds with Bert's family. Seated are Bert's parents, Gilberto Peña Romulo and Asuncion Gatmaitan Romulo. Standing from right to left are Bert's siblings: Rodolfo Romulo, Wilhelmina Romulo, and Risa Romulo, marking a moment of familial unity on the occasion of the couple's marriage.

Yet it was public health — not law or finance — that quietly expanded his understanding of service.

In the **mid-1960s**, Don **Paquito Ortigas** invited Bert to become Executive Director of the Philippine Tuberculosis Society, an institution founded in **1910** and long committed to prevention, treatment, and research. Tuberculosis was increasingly under control, but its management required coordination across barangays, clinics, volunteers, and local governments — long before “community-based healthcare” became policy language.

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The Romulo couple, a lineage shaped by strong family ties, education, and a tradition of public service that spans generations.

Bert thrived in this environment. Throughout the **late 1960s and early 1970s**, he worked closely with barangays across Greater Manila, helping to strengthen referral systems, volunteer networks, and logistical coordination. It was here — almost unknowingly — that he learned grassroots governance: how credibility is earned face to face, how trust travels person to person, how institutions only function when communities believe in them.

These were not political lessons yet. But they would become political instincts.

By **1970**, Bert's professional life had expanded beyond national borders once more. He was appointed Director of Finance and Administration of Jaycees International, headquartered in Coral Gables, Florida. The role required relocating his family to the United States for two years, overseeing financial systems for a global organization operating across dozens of countries.

The assignment was daunting. He was selected from a large field of candidates, entrusted with ensuring that the organization not only functioned but remained solvent. Those who worked with him later recalled how quickly doubts faded. Bert brought order without intimidation, discipline without rigidity. Leadership, he believed, was a form of stewardship.

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By the time he returned to Manila in the **early 1970s**, his worldview had widened — but his temperament remained unchanged. He was more convinced than ever that institutions mattered, and that service required systems strong enough to survive their leaders.

It was during this period — **1975**, to be precise — that Alberto Romulo entered the Rotary Club of Manila.

He did not arrive as an aspirant. He arrived as a student.

Rotary was not impressed by résumés. It was sustained by memory. Its rituals, committees, and expectations formed a parallel education — one rooted in service but governed by procedure. Bert plunged into it with characteristic seriousness.

Under the mentorship of Father **Francisco “Frank” G. Reyes, OFM** of the Santuario de San Antonio, he was appointed board secretary almost immediately. It was an apprenticeship by immersion. The Rotary Club of Manila operated through more than fifty committees, each with its own rhythms and histories. Bert attended multiple meetings a day, listened carefully, took meticulous notes, and learned how consensus was built rather than imposed.



Bert in 1974, serving as Executive Director of the Philippine Tuberculosis Society, photographed at the Quezon Institute — a role that underscored his commitment to public health and social service at one of the country's foremost institutions dedicated to the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis.



In 1978, Bert was elected President of the Rotary Club of Manila. The photograph captures Carlos P. Romulo, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, delivering remarks during Bert's inaugural meeting — an encounter that symbolically linked two generations of Romulos in service to country, diplomacy, and civic leadership.

A Presidency That Revealed a Governing Style

Rotary suited him. It rewarded preparation, discouraged ego, and placed service within structure. By 1977, just two years after joining, Bert was elected president of the Rotary Club of Manila — by one of the largest margins in the club's history.

His presidency was methodical and expansive.

The day after his election in 1977, Bert visited every elected director individually — not ceremonially, but deliberately — to discuss mission, responsibility, and expectations. Mentorship, for him, was not inspiration. It was architecture. During his presidency, he appointed Francisco “Paqui” Ortigas III as board secretary, quietly preparing another generation for leadership.

Those who served under him recall

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something consistent: clarity without coercion. Bert did not command. He aligned.

That year, he hosted the *Diamond Joint District Conference* of Districts 380, 382, 385, and 386 in celebration of sixty years of service, publishing a commemorative Diamond Book and producing medallions, car stickers, and plates to mark the milestone — not as souvenirs, but as a record. Past District Governor Marianito Lichauco's *History of Rotary in the Philippines* was supported and disseminated to all Philippine Rotarians, allowing the organization to “reach out to the past” in order to ground the present. He launched *Operation Paglilinis ng Palengke*, emphasizing public hygiene at the grassroots. He sponsored the Waiters Placement Seminar, bridging livelihood with dignity.

Through RCM's Medico-Surgical “Reach Out” Mission, medical assistance was extended to indigent communities in Northeastern Mindanao. The club participated in the First Metro Manila Restaurant and Small Eateries Cleanliness Contest. A Christmas Drive distributed ₱20,000 worth of goods. A ₱5,000 check was extended to the Rotary Club of Gumaca for fire victims.



With Fred Ruiz Castro, the 12th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, photographed during Bert's term as President of the Rotary Club of Manila in 1979 — a moment reflecting the close intersections of civic leadership, law, and public service during that period.

The Tulungan Center in Malate was completed at a cost exceeding ₱32,000. RCM Foundation, Inc. was established. Six Paul Harris Fellows were produced during his term.

None of this was loud. All of it endured.

By the late **1970s**, his life had reached a rare equilibrium. He was professionally accomplished, deeply embedded in civic institutions, and intellectually grounded.

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At home, with his wife Rosie Lovely Tecson-Romulo, he was raising their children — Lupe, Mons, Roman, Berna, and Erwin — in a household where duty was modeled rather than preached.



The Romulo family, gathered in a moment that reflects their close bonds, shared heritage, and enduring sense of kinship.

Politics had not yet called him.

But the habits required for it — restraint, patience, institutional loyalty, and moral clarity — had already been rehearsed for nearly two decades.

When history finally disrupted that equilibrium, Alberto Romulo would not need to reinvent himself.

He would simply step forward.

The moment invited grandeur. Bert declined excess.

Bert articulated the logic with characteristic restraint: history was not nostalgia; it was instruction.

One of the quiet triumphs of Bert's Rotary presidency was achieved not through ceremony, but through credibility.

Through sustained institutional engagement, Rotary secured Presidential Proclamation No. 1809, declaring January 29 to February 4 of every year as Rotary International Week in the Philippines.

It was not a political act. It was a civic acknowledgment — recognition that voluntary service, when organized and sustained, merited national regard.

Bert never claimed the achievement. He treated it as evidence that institutions, when patient, could be heard without shouting.

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The TOWER Awards: Recognition Without Privilege

Among Bert's most enduring contributions was the strengthening and institutionalization of the TOWER Awards, conceived in 1976 to honor Filipino workers whose excellence rarely attracted public notice.

The philosophy was deliberate. The awards were not for prominence, but for contribution. They affirmed dignity without conferring rank.

Bert ensured that the program was structurally embedded within Rotary Manila — not attached to his presidency, not branded by personality. Committees were formed. Criteria were clarified. Continuity was protected.

Decades later, the TOWER Awards would remain Rotary Manila's longest-running and most nationally recognized program — a quiet confirmation of Bert's belief that the best institutions survive their founders by design.

Youth, Work, and the Shape of the Future

Bert's Rotary presidency gave particular attention to the future — not as abstraction, but as preparation.



In Bert's own words: "General Romulo, or C.P.R., as he was fondly called, literally took my hand and led me to public service. I loved him as my second father and mentor, and he remains my lodestar."

The tribute speaks to the profound influence of Carlos P. Romulo on Bert's life — an enduring bond rooted in guidance, trust, and a shared devotion to national service.

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Career information convocations were organized for graduating students. Job training and placement seminars were conducted for out-of-school youth and wards of Boys' Town. Rotaract and Interact clubs were not merely sponsored but integrated into the club's rhythm.

Students were invited into Rotary meetings as participants, not symbols.

During Youth Activities Week, Bert invited Diwata Reyes, then Editor-in-Chief of *The Philippine Collegian*, as Guest of Honor and Speaker — a subtle but unmistakable signal that critical thinking and civic engagement belonged in the same room. Bert was not unsettled by dissent. He believed institutions weakened when they excluded questioning voices.

Perhaps the most revealing moments of Bert's Rotary presidency occurred away from ballrooms and proclamations.

During a visit to the children's pavilion of the National Orthopedic Hospital, Bert and fellow Rotarians encountered a suffering that resisted language. Children lay crowded into cribs, many immobilized by casts, others suspended by slings. The club had come to deliver ten new cribs and to see what modest interventions — paint, cleanliness, order — could accomplish.

Bert later wrote of the children's eyes, of small hands waving, of a boy forcing a smile through pain. There was no rhetoric in the account. Only observation.

From this encounter flowed Rotary's intensified commitment to the 3-H Program — Health, Hunger, and Humanity. Under Bert's watch, more than 70,000 doses of tetanus toxoid vaccine were airlifted from Canada to the Philippines for Rotary's first full-scale immunization effort.

For Bert, compassion was not sentimental. It was logistical.

Bert's presidency also deepened Rotary Manila's international engagement. The club hosted the First Asian Rotary Fellowship Golf Tournament, attended Rotary International Conventions in Tokyo (1978) and Rome (1979), and expanded friendships across Asia.

These exchanges mattered to Bert not for ceremony, but for habit. He believed that contact preceded trust, and trust preceded cooperation. Long before he would represent the Philippines abroad, he was already practicing diplomacy in its quietest form.

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Leaving Without Residue

As his presidency concluded in June 1979 at the Manila Hilton, Bert did not speak of legacy. In his valedictory message, he spoke instead of obligation.

His valedictory message at the close of his Rotary presidency was revealing — not for what it claimed, but for what it emphasized. There was no triumphalism. Instead, there was gratitude, continuity, and a call to carry the torch forward. He spoke of children in hospital wards, of modest interventions that produced dignity rather than dependency. He invoked not power, but responsibility — the idea that progress was built from countless small acts of discipline and care.

Even then, one could glimpse the statesman he would later become.

Rotary taught him something no classroom could: how ideals survived when translated into budgets, committees, and minutes of meetings. It taught him that leadership was less about command than about trust, and that institutions endured only when leaders resisted the temptation to personalize them.

By **1979**, when Bert stepped down as Rotary president, he had not yet entered politics. But the transition was already underway — not outwardly, but inwardly.



Bert with Mother Teresa, the renowned nun-missionary whose life of humility and service to the poorest of the poor would later be formally recognized by the Catholic Church when she was canonized as Saint Teresa of Calcutta.

He had learned how to carry authority lightly.

He invoked the Roman citizen who carried a soldier's pack beyond the required mile — not out of duty, but choice. Leadership, he believed, always demanded more than mandate.

He passed the torch deliberately to

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President-Elect **Francisco “Paqui” M. Ortigas III**, thanked his board, acknowledged the Rotary Anns, and expressed gratitude to his wife, Lovely Romulo, whose presence he described simply and without flourish.

There was no attempt to linger.

By the end of the 1970s, Bert had not yet sought elective office. But he had already mastered a rarer discipline: how to lead without owning, how to influence without imposing, and how to leave without diminishing those who followed.

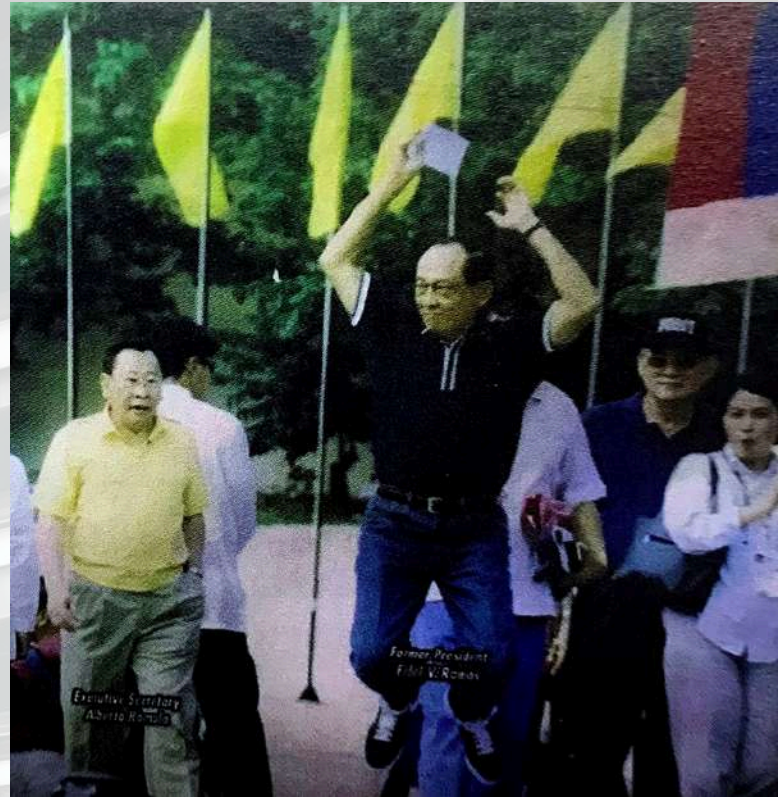
When national politics finally called, it would not find a novice.

It would find a man trained by institutions — ready to enter power having first learned its limits.

The Threshold of Power: Entering Politics Without Losing Restraint

Bert did not enter politics out of impatience. For most of his adult life, he had believed that institutions — when properly tended — could correct themselves. He trusted process. He trusted continuity. He trusted that reform, however slow, was preferable to rupture.

By the early 1980s, he was already in his late forties — an age when many politicians were planning their second or third ascent. Bert had resisted that



Bert (far left) joined Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel V. Ramos, together with more than two million Filipino civilians, in the nonviolent uprising that stunned the world. The historic People Power Revolution (February 22–25, 1986) was a nationwide campaign of civil resistance against political violence and electoral fraud. United by faith, courage, and collective resolve, the movement ultimately brought an end to the twenty-year authoritarian rule of Ferdinand E. Marcos, restoring democratic institutions and reshaping the course of Philippine history.

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timetable. He had watched politics from close range, advised quietly, and served institutions whose influence depended on credibility rather than coercion. What he had not done — deliberately — was seek office.

That restraint would make his eventual entry consequential.

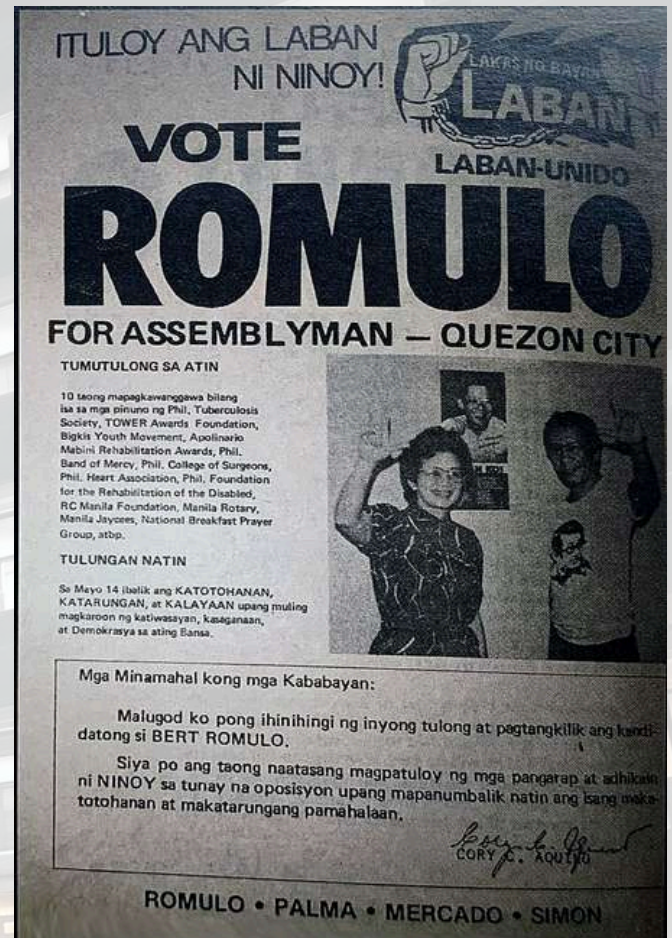
Then came **August 1983**.

The assassination of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr. did not immediately turn Bert into a politician. It did something quieter and more unsettling: it collapsed his belief that silence was still a form of responsibility. Like many Filipinos of his generation — especially those who had spent decades building institutions from within — he waited at first, watching, listening, measuring.

The streets, however, were no longer waiting.

What followed in the months after Ninoy’s death was not merely outrage, but moral disorientation. Institutions that were supposed to protect order had become instruments of fear. The careful balance Bert had spent years mastering — between authority and restraint, power and accountability — had tipped.

By **1984**, the question confronting him was no longer whether he was prepared for politics. It was whether his refusal to enter it had become a form of evasion.



Bert ran under the UNIDO–PDP–LABAN opposition slate led by Corazon Aquino in the election for representatives to the Batasang Pambansa. He was part of a distinguished lineup that included radio broadcaster Orlando Mercado; eminent jurist Cecilia Muñoz-Palma, the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court of the Philippines; and civic leader Brigido Simon Jr., who would later serve as Mayor of Quezon City. Together, they represented a reformist coalition committed to democratic restoration and principled public service during a pivotal chapter in Philippine political history.

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Those closest to him noticed the change. He spoke less, but thought more intensely. Conversations that once revolved around policy design began circling back to first principles: legitimacy, consent, responsibility. The habits of discipline that had defined his life now pushed him toward a conclusion he had long resisted.

Enough was enough.

When Bert decided to run for the **Regular Batasang Pambansa** representing Quezon City, it was not framed as ambition. It was framed as duty. He joined a slate that included figures of unquestioned moral standing — Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma and Orly Mercado — individuals whose presence signaled seriousness rather than opportunism. The decision was neither impulsive nor ideological theater. It was practical. By then, the Marcos regime had begun to fray — economically weakened, morally exhausted, and increasingly disconnected from public trust. Institutions were brittle. Voices inside government were few, and many of them compromised.

Bert believed that withdrawal no longer preserved integrity.

He entered the race without the vocabulary of defiance. His campaign was quiet, disciplined, and grounded in



In 1986, Bert was sworn in by President Corazon C. Aquino as Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management, entrusting him with the stewardship of public resources at a critical moment of democratic restoration following the People Power Revolution.

competence rather than outrage. He spoke of budgets, accountability, and the dangers of governing without limits — language that rarely electrified crowds but resonated with voters weary of excess.

The campaign was austere by design. Bert did not posture. He did not promise transformation. He spoke instead about competence, restraint, and institutional repair. Voters responded not to charisma, but to credibility.

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He won.

The Batasang Pambansa was not designed to be adversarial. It was a legislature operating within constraints, its independence circumscribed, its debates often performative. Many who entered it chose either accommodation or theatrics.

Bert chose neither.

From **1984 to 1986**, Bert served as assemblyman during one of the most volatile periods in Philippine political history. The Batasan itself was an uneasy institution — functioning, but strained; deliberative, but constrained. Bert approached it the only way he knew how: by mastering its rules, respecting its procedures, and using its limited space to insist on accountability.

He was not a firebrand. He did not posture. He studied bills, asked procedural questions, and pressed for clarity in appropriations. His interventions were precise. When he spoke, it was usually late in the discussion — after listening, after weighing, after identifying where language failed logic.

Colleagues noticed that he did not personalize disagreement. He challenged proposals without challenging people. In a political culture



Bert was sworn in as Senator of the Republic of the Philippines in 1987, formally entering the Upper Chamber during the country's renewed democratic era. He was joined on this significant occasion by his wife and children — his daughter Bernadette Fatima Romulo and his son Roman Gabriel Romulo — a quiet yet powerful reminder that his public service was firmly rooted in family, faith, and shared commitment to the nation.

shaped by loyalty tests and retaliation, this unsettled both allies and opponents.

Bert did not seek confrontation. But neither did he retreat.

He was not incendiary. He was meticulous.

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February 1986: The Collapse of Certainty

Then, in **February 1986**, the system finally collapsed.

The snap elections of February 1986 ended whatever illusion of permanence the regime still possessed. The weeks that followed — marked by contested results, public outrage, and quiet defections — pushed the country toward rupture. The EDSA People Power Revolution did not merely depose a regime; *it dissolved the political order that had governed Bert's brief legislative career.* The Batasang Pambansa was abolished. The question facing the country — and Bert himself — was what would replace it.

When the **EDSA People Power Revolution** unfolded, Bert was not on the barricades. He was not on television. He was inside government, watching the institutional scaffolding give way.

What distinguished him during those days was not visibility, but steadiness.

He understood that revolutions succeeded or failed not only on the streets, but in the days after — when decisions had to be made without scripts, when power changed hands faster than rules could be rewritten.



Bert (front row, second from left) was invited by President Corazon Aquino to represent the Philippine Senate during the historic state visit of President Aquino and her Cabinet to China in April 1988 — a landmark diplomatic mission that marked the normalization and strengthening of relations between the Philippines and China in the post-People Power era.

President Corazon Aquino, assembling a government amid uncertainty, looked not for loyalists but for stabilizers. She chose Bert as **interim Minister of the Budget** during the transition period.

It was an inspired, if understated, choice. It was not a glamorous assignment. It was, in fact, among the most perilous.

The new government inherited empty coffers, fractured agencies, and a public

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hungry for immediate transformation. Expectations were vast. Resources were not.

Bert accepted the role without public celebration.

Budgets reveal values. In times of upheaval, they also reveal discipline — or its absence. Bert brought to the task what he had always brought to institutions under strain: structure without rigidity, principle without drama. He believed that reform without fiscal responsibility was merely rhetoric postponed.

His tenure was brief but consequential. He helped restore coherence to public finance at a moment when coherence itself was fragile. There were no grandstanding speeches, no self-congratulation. There was simply work.

Governing Without Noise

When elections were called in **1987**, Bert faced another decision. He could have remained safely within the executive branch, insulated from electoral risk. Instead, he resigned and ran for the **twenty-four-seat Senate**.

He won — placing among the top candidates.

The Constitution shortened what would have been a six-year term to five. Bert used every year.



Bert with President Corazon Aquino, Miguel Romero, and a Chinese host, featured on the front cover of Asiaweek (1988) under the headline “Cory in China.” The cover captured a defining moment of Philippine diplomacy during President Aquino’s landmark visit to China, symbolizing renewed international engagement in the post-People Power era.

The Senate he joined was newly restored but deeply unsettled. Democracy had returned, but habits had not yet caught up. The chamber was crowded with ambition, memory, grievance, and expectation. Many senators spoke as if history itself were listening. Bert listened as if history would ask questions later.

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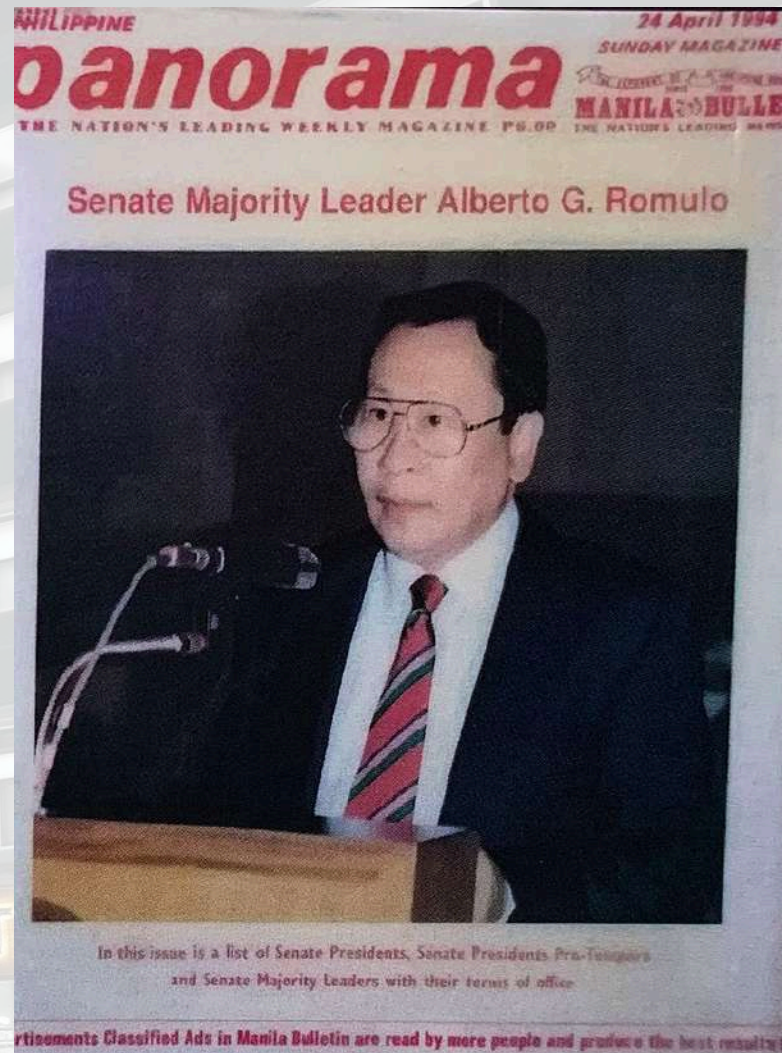
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He was quickly recognized not for eloquence, but for dependability.

In the early years of the restored Congress, legislation arrived unevenly — some bold, some hasty, many symbolic. Bert gravitated instinctively toward the less visible work: shaping committee outputs, reconciling conflicting drafts, ensuring that laws were implementable rather than merely expressive. He believed that a bill unfinished in its details was a promise deferred to failure.

By the **early 1990s**, his colleagues had come to rely on him as a stabilizing force. When debates grew heated, Bert would often intervene not with argument but with structure — summarizing positions, identifying points of convergence, and proposing a procedural path forward. It was leadership by calibration.

This made him an unlikely but effective **Majority Leader**, a role he would hold for **five years**. Working closely with Senate President Neptali Gonzales Sr., Bert helped guide the legislative agenda with a rhythm that emphasized preparation over performance. The Senate functioned not because voices were raised, but because schedules were respected, committees were disciplined, and negotiations were conducted quietly.



Front cover of Philippine Panorama (Manila Bulletin, April 24, 1994), featuring Alberto G. Romulo, who was named Senate Majority Leader of the 9th Congress on July 27, 1992 — a role that placed him at the center of legislative leadership during a pivotal period of post-EDSA governance.

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A former Senate President, Paterno, would later describe Bert's stewardship as "indefatigable," praising his ability to balance competing egos while maintaining legislative momentum. The compliment was telling: it spoke not of dominance, but of endurance.

Bert's legislative record reflected this temperament. Over the course of his Senate career, he served as **principal author of 48 laws** and **co-author of 127 others** — figures impressive not for their quantity alone, but for their coherence. His interests gravitated toward fiscal responsibility, governance reform, and institutional clarity. He was wary of laws that promised benefits without identifying funding, or authority without accountability.

That wariness extended to his own conduct.

In the **mid-1990s**, as pork barrel politics increasingly blurred the lines between legislation and patronage, Bert made a decision that surprised even his allies. For the final three years of his term, he refused to use his allocated discretionary funds. He argued publicly — and repeatedly — that legislators were not implementers, that appropriations belonged to the executive branch, and that the temptation to conflate lawmaking with spending eroded institutional integrity.



Senator Bert Romulo in action on the Senate floor, engaged in legislative debate and deliberation — an image that captures his active role in shaping policy and upholding democratic discourse during his years of service in the Upper Chamber.

It was not a popular position. It was not meant to be.

Bert never framed the decision as moral superiority. He framed it as constitutional fidelity. "Legislators should legislate," he said. "Project implementation is an executive function." The clarity of the statement left little room for misinterpretation.

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Throughout these years, Bert remained remarkably consistent in another way: he resisted permanence. When his second term concluded in **1998**, he declined to seek a third, despite encouragement from supporters who believed his experience was needed. Term limits, he insisted, were not inconveniences to be navigated but principles to be honored.

This belief was not theoretical. It governed his choices even when it constrained them.

By the end of his Senate career, Bert had become something increasingly rare in Philippine politics: a figure respected across factions, trusted across administrations, and untouched by scandal. He had never been flashy. He had never needed to be. His authority derived from preparation, restraint, and an almost stubborn loyalty to institutional roles.

Yet the end of his Senate service did not mark a withdrawal.

It marked a transition.

In **2001**, following political upheaval once again, Bert would be called back — this time not as legislator, but as steward of the nation's finances, then as



Bert with Pope John Paul II, Fidel V. Ramos, and First Lady Amelita M. Ramos in 1995. The moment reflects the intersection of faith, state leadership, and public service during a period of renewed global and diplomatic engagement for the Philippines.

chief of staff to the presidency, and eventually as the country's principal diplomat.

The work ahead would require not just discipline, but nerve.

And for perhaps the first time, Alberto Romulo would be asked not merely to preserve institutions — but to defend the nation itself.

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The Weight of the Purse

When Bert was asked to return to government service in early **2001**, the invitation came not as an honor but as a burden. The country was again in transition — this time abrupt, volatile, and uncertain. Institutions were intact, but trust was brittle. Markets were wary. The state needed reassurance, not rhetoric.

Bert was appointed **Secretary of Finance** not because he inspired confidence in crowds, but because he inspired confidence in numbers.

The fiscal situation he inherited was fragile. Revenues lagged behind obligations. Deficits had become normalized. International observers were cautious, some openly skeptical. Bert approached the task the way he always had: by diagnosing before prescribing. He reviewed assumptions, recalibrated forecasts, and insisted on clarity where optimism had previously sufficed.

He understood that confidence — especially financial confidence — was cumulative. It could not be demanded. It had to be earned, line by line.

In Cabinet meetings, Bert was often the quietest voice in the room. But when he



Bert with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese politician and diplomat who became an international symbol of democratic resistance and played a pivotal role in Myanmar's transition from military rule toward a period of civilian-led governance.

spoke, discussions slowed. He was known to ask questions that reframed the problem rather than answered it: *What are we assuming? What happens if we are wrong? Who carries the risk?* These were not ideological questions. They were structural ones.

By **mid-2001**, Bert was already signaling an uncomfortable truth: reform would require restraint before relief. Taxes would need rationalization. Enforcement would need credibility.

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In January 2001, Bert was sworn in as Secretary of Finance by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, assuming stewardship of the nation's fiscal and economic policy at a critical moment of political transition and financial reform.

Spending would need discipline — not theatrics. He resisted shortcuts that might buy temporary applause at the cost of long-term stability.

This posture did not make him universally popular. Finance secretaries rarely are.

What it did was restore a degree of seriousness to fiscal governance. International partners — multilateral institutions, credit rating agencies, bilateral lenders — began to read the Philippines differently. Not as a country chasing growth through improvisation, but as one attempting to re-anchor policy in prudence.

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Bert's approach was shaped by memory. He had seen crises before: devaluations, capital flight, political shocks. He knew how quickly markets punished inconsistency. He also knew how slowly credibility returned.

In **late 2001**, his responsibilities expanded. He was asked to serve concurrently as **Executive Secretary**, effectively the President's chief of staff. The dual role placed him at the crossroads of policy and politics, where fiscal logic often collided with political necessity.

Bert navigated the tension without theatrical protest. He did not moralize disagreements. He documented them. When proposals crossed his desk, he evaluated not just their intent but their institutional implications. Could the bureaucracy execute this? Would it survive legal scrutiny? What precedent would it set?

These questions made him indispensable — and occasionally inconvenient.

Yet even critics acknowledged his reliability. He did not leak. He did not grandstand. He did not personalize disputes. His loyalty was not to personalities, but to process.



Bert was appointed Executive Secretary on June 8, 2001, by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, placing him at the center of executive coordination and policy implementation during a pivotal period of her administration.

By **2003**, as the administration stabilized and reform efforts matured, Bert's role evolved again. He began to spend more time engaging external counterparts — foreign finance officials, multilateral agencies, investors — explaining not just what the Philippines planned to do, but how it thought about doing it.

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In these exchanges, his European training surfaced. He spoke of continuity. Of institutional memory. Of the dangers of overcorrecting in response to crisis. Progress, he argued, was less about dramatic turns than about sustained alignment.

When Bert stepped away from the Finance portfolio in **2004**, the fiscal challenges were far from resolved. But the framework had shifted. Decisions were again being made within boundaries. Discipline had returned as a governing value.

He left without claiming credit.

That would become a pattern.

Later that same year, he would be entrusted with a role that required an entirely different kind of judgment — one less numerical, more existential. The country's voice abroad had grown uncertain. Its alliances were under strain. Its sovereignty would soon be tested.

And Alberto Romulo — methodical, reserved, unflinching — would be asked to carry the nation's position not in spreadsheets, but on the world stage.

That test would define his final and most consequential chapter in public life.



Bert, then Executive Secretary, greeting Colin Powell, United States Secretary of State, during an official call at Malacañang Palace on August 3, 2002 — a moment underscoring high-level diplomatic engagement between the Philippines and the United States.

Avoiding the Cult of Personality

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Bert did not cultivate a public persona. He gave few grand interviews. He avoided quotable outrage. His name was rarely associated with controversy.

This was deliberate.

He believed senators were stewards, not performers.

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In a chamber increasingly shaped by media attention, Bert remained focused on internal coherence. His influence was felt most strongly not in headlines, but in final drafts.

By the mid-1990s, Bert had become something rare in Philippine politics: a senator whose authority rested on trust rather than fear, competence rather than charisma.

Younger legislators sought his counsel. Older ones relied on his memory. Administrations consulted him when proposals needed grounding.

He had mastered the art of being indispensable without being visible.

As his Senate term drew to a close, Bert faced a decision. He could have pursued higher office. He had the résumé, the respect, the networks.

He chose otherwise.

Public service, he believed, was not a ladder. It was a series of rooms. One entered when useful. One exited when finished.

His departure from the Senate was quiet.

His reputation endured.



Bert taking his oath of office as Secretary of Foreign Affairs under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in August 2004, formally assuming the country's top diplomatic post and continuing a lifetime of service in international and public affairs.

By the end of this chapter, Bert had completed his legislative formation. He had proven that restraint could coexist with influence, and that authority need not announce itself to be effective. The next phase would test these convictions in a different arena — **foreign policy**, where words carried consequences far beyond borders.

Diplomacy as Discipline: Speaking Softly for a Noisy World

Power, when exercised at the level of

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nations, is often mistaken for volume. The louder the declaration, the firmer the resolve — or so the assumption goes. Bert never believed this. By the time he assumed leadership of the Department of Foreign Affairs in the mid-2000s, he had already learned a harder lesson: that in diplomacy, durability matters more than drama, and restraint more than display.

The corridors of the DFA did not change when Bert became Secretary. The routines remained: early briefings, cables read line by line, memos returned with marginal notes instead of instructions barked aloud. What changed was the tone. There was less urgency to impress, more insistence on coherence. Bert did not ask his diplomats to move faster. He asked them to think longer.

Foreign policy, as he practiced it, was not an extension of politics by other means. It was an architecture — slowly built, carefully load-bearing, intolerant of shortcuts. And nowhere would this philosophy be tested more relentlessly than in ASEAN.

ASEAN as Discipline, Not Stage

To outsiders, ASEAN often appears ceremonial: annual summits, choreographed handshakes, statements



Bert with Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, on September 1, 2004, during the state visit of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to China — an engagement that underscored high-level bilateral diplomacy and the strengthening of Philippine–Chinese relations in the early 21st century.

dense with adjectives and light on enforcement. Bert understood the criticism. He also understood the deeper truth. ASEAN was not designed to move quickly. It was designed to prevent rupture.

For Bert, this was not a weakness but a constraint — one that demanded intellectual patience and moral clarity.



Bert addressing the 59th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on September 27, 2004, articulating the Philippines' positions and priorities before the global community at a critical forum of international diplomacy.

Consensus, in ASEAN, was not something to be conquered. It was something to be cultivated, even when doing so meant accepting incremental gains over dramatic wins.

When the Philippines assumed the chairmanship of ASEAN in the latter half of the decade, Bert approached the

role as a custodian rather than a crusader. The task was not to dominate the agenda but to hold it together. Negotiations on the ASEAN Charter, including provisions that would eventually give rise to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, required a delicate balance between aspiration and

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acceptability. Push too hard, and the charter would fracture. Move too softly, and it would mean nothing.

Bert chose the middle path — the most difficult one. He framed human rights not as an imposition of values but as a

shared regional investment in stability. He argued not from moral absolutism, but from institutional self-interest: a region that cannot articulate its own norms will eventually have them imposed by others.

This was Bert's foreign policy instinct at work — never confrontational, never evasive. Firm without being theatrical. Patient without being passive.



Bert with United States President George H. W. Bush and Mrs. Barbara Bush at the White House, following the annual National Prayer Breakfast — an occasion reflecting faith, diplomacy, and high-level international engagement.



Bert and Lovely Romulo with United States President George W. Bush and Mrs. Laura Bush at the White House, following the annual National Prayer Breakfast — an occasion that brought together faith, public service, and international fellowship.



Bert and his family welcoming Hillary Rodham Clinton, United States Secretary of State, during her official visit to Manila on November 12, 2009 — a moment reflecting the warmth of Philippine–U.S. relations and the personal dimension of high-level diplomacy.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Bert during a one-on-one meeting with Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Goldenberg Mansion in Manila in 2009 — a private diplomatic engagement set within one of the country's most historic state residences.



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The Three Pillars, Lived

During his tenure, Bert articulated what would come to be known as the three pillars of Philippine foreign policy: national security, economic diplomacy, and the protection of overseas Filipinos. But these were not slogans devised for speeches. They were conclusions drawn from experience.

Security, for Bert, was inseparable from multilateral credibility. The Philippines could not secure its interests alone, nor could it rely indefinitely on alliances unanchored by regional legitimacy. ASEAN, imperfect as it was, provided a framework where disputes could be slowed, managed, and — sometimes — defused.

Economic diplomacy, meanwhile, was not about courting capital with promises that could not be kept. It was about predictability. Trade agreements, strategic partnerships, and development assistance only flowed toward countries that honored commitments quietly and consistently. Bert believed that reputation, once lost, was almost impossible to recover.

And then there were the overseas Filipino workers — the quiet majority of



With United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during Bert's official visit to the United States Department of State in Washington, D.C. on May 17, 2005 — a meeting reflecting ongoing high-level engagement between the Philippines and the United States.

the nation's external presence. Bert rejected the idea that OFWs were merely labor exports. They were citizens first, ambassadors by circumstance. Their welfare was not an add-on to foreign policy; it was its moral baseline.

In this sense, Bert's diplomacy always began at the border — and often at the airport.

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The Passport as Dignity

Long before biometrics became commonplace, Bert was unsettled by how Filipino travelers were treated abroad. Delays. Suspicion. Quiet humiliation at immigration counters where documents were scrutinized more closely than faces.

The move toward a machine-readable passport, and eventually the Philippine ePassport, was not driven by technological fashion. It was driven by an ethical concern: that a Filipino abroad should not have to explain the legitimacy of their identity.

The legal battles were protracted. The reforms slow. But when the ePassport was finally launched, the Philippines found itself among the early adopters globally — its travel document secure, interoperable, and respected. The change was subtle but profound. A passport, Bert believed, should not merely permit travel. It should confer confidence.

This, too, was foreign policy — executed not in summits but in systems.



Through Bert's initiative to establish regional offices nationwide, Filipinos no longer needed to travel to Manila to apply for passports, significantly easing access to consular services across the country. Notably, a remote passport office was also set up at the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), enabling overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their families to avail themselves of passport services more conveniently. The reform reflected a deliberate shift toward decentralization, accessibility, and citizen-centered public service under the Department of Foreign Affairs.

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Leadership Seen from Within

Those who worked under Bert understood his style best. Enrique Manalo, then Undersecretary for Policy, would later reflect that Bert's most distinctive trait was not decisiveness but trust. He did not micromanage. He did not posture. Instead, he set a direction and expected competence to rise to it.

There was, within the DFA, a shift in self-perception. The department no longer saw itself as reactive, but as capable of initiative. Problems were framed not in terms of obstacles but possibilities. It was a cultural change more than an administrative one.

Bert's authority was never loud. But it was steady. And in diplomacy, steadiness often outlasts brilliance.

There were moments, however, when consensus proved elusive — and when restraint alone was insufficient. In a now-historic ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh, discussions over the South China Sea collapsed into unprecedented discord. For the first time in ASEAN's history, no joint communiqué was issued.

Bert had warned his counterparts of the danger: that silence in the face of encroachment invited repetition. He quoted a familiar moral progression —



With Pak Ui-chun, Foreign Minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, following the signing of a memorandum of agreement establishing bilateral consultation mechanisms between the two countries. The agreement was concluded on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Manila on July 29, 2007, marking a formal step toward structured diplomatic dialogue.

how injustice, tolerated in increments, eventually becomes unavoidable. His intervention did not salvage the communiqué. But it clarified the stakes.

President Benigno Aquino III would later echo the same warning at the leaders' level: that the failure to defend a neighbor's rights today endangered one's own tomorrow.

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Bert understood the cost of such moments. Standing firm could isolate. But retreating would redefine the Philippines' posture for years to come. He chose firmness — not as provocation, but as record.

When Bert stepped down from the DFA in the early 2010s, there was no sense of unfinished business. That, perhaps, was the point. The systems were in place. The culture had shifted. The Philippines' voice — measured, credible, and consistent — was recognized even when it disagreed. He did not leave behind a doctrine. He left behind a method.

Foreign policy, in Bert's hands, had never been about asserting presence. It was about preserving space — space for dialogue, for dignity, for a nation to move without being pushed.

The next chapter of his life would turn toward stewardship of a different kind — economic, institutional, and deeply personal. But before that transition, this much was clear:

Alberto Romulo had shown that in a world addicted to noise, quiet conviction could still hold the line.



On August 11, 2009, the Department of Foreign Affairs formally launched the electronic passport, or “ePassport,” with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as its first recipient. The photograph captures the ribbon-cutting ceremony during the “ePassport” exhibit, marking a significant milestone in the modernization of Philippine consular services and travel documentation.

The Long View: What Endures After Power

There comes a stage in public life when authority no longer derives from position but from trust — earned, tested, and quietly reaffirmed. For Bert, that stage arrived not as a withdrawal from public service, but as a return to its most elemental form: stewardship.

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When Bert accepted the chairmanship of the **Development Bank of the Philippines**, the assignment did not announce itself as a coda to a long career. It read, instead, like a familiar problem set — capital, risk, time. DBP was not a political platform. It was an institution with memory and obligation, designed to finance the long arc of national development rather than the short burst of applause.

Bert approached the bank with the instincts he had honed over decades: reconcile before you promise; fortify systems before you expand them; measure impact not by velocity but by durability. Development, he believed, was not an act of generosity. It was a discipline. Loans were not favors; they were commitments whose consequences would be borne by communities long after the signatures dried.

Under his stewardship, DBP was treated less as a dispenser of funds and more as a partner in national intent — supporting infrastructure, industry, and local enterprise with the same restraint he had practiced in diplomacy. The mindset was familiar: credibility first, ambition second. Progress without spectacle.

Yet if institutions reveal how a man thinks, family reveals how he feels.



Bert chairing the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development, held from March 16 to March 18, 2010, in Manila, Philippines — a gathering that underscored the country's role in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful cooperation among nations.

At the center of Bert's life stood his wife, Rosie Lovely Tecson-Romulo — “Lovely” to those who knew her — whose steadiness mirrored his own. Their partnership was not performative. It was practical, affectionate, and quietly sustaining, built on shared endurance rather than shared limelight.

Together, they raised five children, each of whom carried forward a different facet of the Romulo inheritance — not as replicas, but as continuations.

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Rosa Guadalupe Angela “Lupe” Romulo, the firstborn, possessed a gentleness that anchored the family. Her passing in November 2017 — after a cascade of illness — left a silence that words could not mend. It was a loss that reordered the emotional geometry of the household, reminding Bert, even in later years, that no preparation shields a parent from grief.

Montserrat “Mons” Romulo channeled conscience into culture. As a writer and the founder of Katutubo PH, she devoted herself to indigenous narratives and social memory — work that echoed her father’s belief that dignity begins with recognition.

Roman Romulo entered public service with legal precision, serving as a legislator and later as Pasig City Representative. Where his father had shaped policy through institutions, Roman worked through lawmaking — direct, contested, and accountable.

Bernadette “Berna” Romulo-Puyat bridged governance and growth, serving as Secretary of Tourism and later as Deputy Governor of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. Her career embodied the same fusion of discipline and empathy that had guided her father’s approach to economic policy.



The Romulo legacy of public service continues. Bernadette Fatima Romulo-Puyat, the youngest daughter of Bert, was appointed Secretary of Tourism under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, carrying forward the family’s long tradition of national service into the next generation.

Erwin Romulo, editor, writer, and musical director, followed a more artistic path — proof that service does not require uniformity. His work gave voice to stories and rhythms that resist bureaucracy but enrich civic life all the same.

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Family photograph taken during the 46th Wedding Anniversary of Bert and Lovely, celebrated on June 30, 2009, at the Santuario de San Antonio Church in Makati City. The image captures a moment of gratitude and togetherness, marking nearly five decades of shared life, faith, and family.

Bert never tried to impose coherence on their choices. Continuity, he understood, does not mean repetition. It means permission.

The Shape of Legacy

In his later years, Bert was often asked

to summarize his philosophy of leadership. He usually declined. The question presumed that ideas precede action. In his life, it had been the other way around.

He believed that institutions outlive individuals only when they are built to

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restrain ego. That diplomacy works best when it protects dignity rather than pursues dominance. That development fails when it outruns trust. And that family — like the republic — is sustained not by perfection, but by presence.

If there is a single throughline to Alberto Romulo's life, it is this: a refusal to confuse motion with progress, or noise with meaning. From classrooms to courtrooms, from ASEAN halls to bank boardrooms, he practiced a form of leadership that moved carefully because it intended to last.

In an age that celebrates disruption, Bert chose continuity. And in doing so, he proved that endurance — quiet, principled, and humane — can be the most radical legacy of all.

Recognition Without Pursuit

Bert never campaigned for recognition. When honors arrived, they did so late, and quietly.

In **May 2023**, the Government of Japan conferred upon him the **Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun**, its highest civilian decoration, recognizing decades of patient work in strengthening Philippine–Japanese relations. The award was presented as part of the Spring Conferment of



Bert with Junichiro Koizumi, then Prime Minister of Japan, reflecting high-level diplomatic engagement and the strengthening of Philippine–Japanese relations.

Japanese Decorations — measured, dignified, free of excess.

Bert accepted the honor surrounded by family. He spoke not of accomplishment, but of friendship between nations — of trust built incrementally, sustained without noise.

It was fitting. His diplomacy had always been cumulative rather than declarative.

DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

Governor's Ball Dance Practice for District Conference and Awards Night 2026



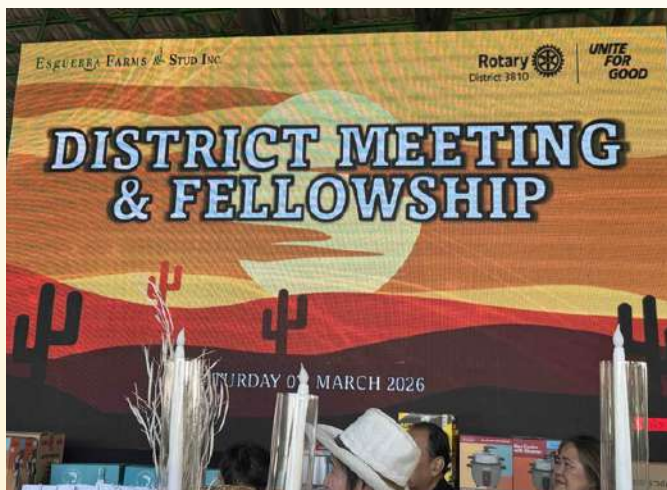
President Raoul Creencia attended the Governor's Ball Dance Practice for District Conference and Awards Night 2026 last March 4, 2026 at the Soliya Events Center, Multinational Village, Parañaque City.

Rotary District 3810's DISCON AND AWARDS NIGHT 2026

A promotional banner for the Rotary District 3810's DISCON & AWARDS NIGHT 2026. The banner features a blue background with yellow and white text. At the top, it says "Rotary District 3810" and "UNITE FOR GOOD". The main title "DISCON & AWARDS NIGHT" is in large, bold, yellow letters. Below the title, it says "MAY 22-24, 2026" and "LE PAVILION PASAY CITY". There are two columns of text: "Early Bird - Until March 15, 2026" and "Regular Rate - March 16 to April 15, 2026". Under "Early Bird" is "Php 7500 DisCon & Awards Night". Under "Regular Rate" is "Php 8500 DisCon & Awards Night". There are two sections: "MEALS INCLUDED" and "ACCOUNT DETAILS". "MEALS INCLUDED" lists "May 22 & 23 PM Snack & Dinner" and "May 24 Lunch, PM Snack & Dinner". "ACCOUNT DETAILS" lists "Bank: Metrobank", "Account No. :271-727154-395-2", "Account Name: Rotary D3810", and "Team Unity Corp". At the bottom, it says "NO ONSITE REGISTRATION" and "REGISTER NOW" with an arrow pointing to "PP Nelia Seril (09175260220) Chairperson for Promotion". There are decorative elements like colorful bunting and fan-like patterns.

DISTRICT EVENTS

District Meeting and Fellowship



Special Assistant to the Governor-Manila SDG Albert S. Alday, President Raoul Creencia, IPP Jujut Enriquez, PE Reggie Yu, SDG/Dir. Mike Albaña and PD Nagi Zeitouni (not in picture) attended the District Meeting and Fellowship for the month of March hosted by DGND Hermie Esguerra and Council of Governors of Rotary District 3810 Chairperson PDG Joyce Ambray last March 7, 2026 at the Esguerra Farms in Lipa City, Batangas.

DISTRICT EVENTS

District Meeting and Fellowship



The District Meeting coincided with the celebration of DGND Hermie Esguerra's birthday.

FELLOWSHIP

Aleco Monday Breakfast Fellowship



The Aleco Monday Breakfast Fellowship was held on March 9, 2026 at Manila Golf, hosted by former RCM member Jorge Salazar.

Attendees discussed a range of topics, from possible 2028 scenarios to the effects of the war in the Middle East. The group also prepared insightful questions for the upcoming Aleco roundtable with Baguio Mayor Benjie Magalong on March 23.

In Loving Memory of Past President Francisco “Toting” V. Del Rosario



MEMORIAL Service for Past President Francisco “Toting” V. Del Rosario, held on Thursday, March 5, 2026 at the Santuario de San Antonio, was attended by Pres Raoul Creencia, PE Reggie Yu, Sec Anton Mauricio, and PD Oscar del Rosario. Also in attendance (not in photo) were PDG Vince Carlos, PDG Alex Cureg, Classification Committee Chair Bren Egan, and PD Art Lopez.



In Loving Memory of
Past President Francisco “Toting” V. Del Rosario



In Loving Memory of
Past President Francisco “Toting” V. Del Rosario



We had a post-wake fellowship
(*pagpag*) at the nearby Wobbly
Pan Spanish Bistro at San Antonio
Town Plaza, Forbes Park with
RCFMI Chair Alex Cureg and wife
Atty. Anna Cureg, PE Reggie Yu,
PD Oscar del Rosario, and Sec.
Anton Mauricio

RCM Past President/Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban's Column in the Philippine Daily Inquirer

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
OPINION

Editor
 Juliet L. Javellana

Legality of arrests, searches, seizures

WITH DUE RESPECT

ARTEMIO V. PANGANIBAN

The Constitution guarantees the fundamental right against unlawful arrests, searches, and seizures, declaring it "inviolable" under the Bill of Rights (Article III, Section 2). This protection is a core aspect of the right to privacy and security—clear in its command yet nuanced in its application, as shown by a recently released (Feb. 25, 2026) decision of the Supreme Court ably penned by Justice Ricardo R. Rosario (People v. Bautista, Oct. 15, 2025). Its limits and exceptions are matters that every citizen, as well as every law enforcer, must understand.

AS A GENERAL RULE, no person can be arrested or searched, and no article can be seized without a warrant issued by a judge empowering law enforcers to perform specific actions. It is a constitutional safeguard, ensuring that every intrusion into a person's life, home, or belongings carries the weight of judicial scrutiny and legal justification.

As outlined in the Revised Rules of Criminal Procedure, a search warrant can be issued only on "probable cause" related to a specific offense, as determined by the judge following an examination under oath of the complainant and the witnesses.

Probable cause is not determined by a fixed formula. In general, it exists when there are "facts and circumstances which could lead a reasonably discreet and prudent person to believe (1) that an offense had been committed and (2) that the items, articles, or objects sought in connection with the said offense are in the place to be searched."

People v. Sapla (June 16, 2020, per Justice Alfredo Benjamin S. Caguioa) emphasized that, absent probable cause, a search warrant issued solely on the basis of an unverified anonymous tip received via text message is illegal. Moreover, the Bill of Rights bars the use of illegally obtained evidence "in any proceeding." Consequently, the Court acquitted the accused.

TO BE SURE, JURISPRUDENCE RECOGNIZES SEVEN INSTANCES when a search and seizure may be conducted without a warrant; that is, when the search (1) is incidental to a lawful arrest; (2) involves an article to be seized in the "plain view" of the officer; (3) is in a moving vehicle; (4) is consented; (5) is done by customs authorities; (6) is characterized as a "stop and frisk" operation; or (7) is a part of "exigent and emergency circumstances."

I do not have the space to discuss the seven exceptions, but the plain view doctrine deserves particular attention because of its frequent, and sometimes misapplied, use in practice. The doctrine allows a law enforcer to seize evidence of a crime without a warrant, provided some conditions are met. People v. Bautista ruled that although some items were not in plain view, the warrantless search remained valid because it was done in flagrante delicto as part of a lawful arrest.

Moreover, Comamo v. People (March 4, 2025, per Justice Mario V. Lopez) clarified that, though a warrant may lack specificity as to certain items, contraband discovered during an otherwise lawful search may be seized. Thus, while the warrant mentioned only an unlicensed gun in a cabinet, the seizure of other illegal firearms and ammunition found in the same cabinet could be seized.

THE EXCEPTIONS ARE STRICTLY CONSTRUED against the law enforcers precisely because the right against unreasonable searches and seizures is "inviolable." But its enforcement is limited by the rights of others.

At gated subdivisions, malls, or private establishments, security personnel routinely inspect bags and vehicles. Standard practice limits them to items visible "in plain sight." More intrusive searches are sometimes allowed, but the rights of others must be respected. Accordingly, while citizens have the right to refuse, the establishments have a corresponding right to deny entry onto their property.

At home, the rules are even more stringent. Under the "knock and announce rule," police officers must announce their presence, identity, and authority before entering and searching homes.

People v. Enriquez (Aug. 7, 2024, per Senior Associate Justice Marvic M.V.F. Leonen) acquitted the accused because the officers failed to announce their intrusion before entering the house and failed to justify why they did not. A validly obtained warrant is not a blank check for forcible entry.

In drug cases, the prosecution must establish an unbroken chain of custody of the evidence obtained via a valid warrant. People v. Acdang (Feb. 4, 2025, per Justice Josep Y. Lopez) acquitted the accused because the prosecution failed to establish this chain, raising doubt about the identity and integrity of the corpus delicti—the very substance of the crime.

In our democracy, every person is presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt. This is not a mere technicality; it is a shield against the excesses of power.

The same principle animates the right to be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures—a reminder that the State's duty to maintain order must be balanced by its higher obligation to preserve liberty.

Liberty is best protected by awareness, not by aggression. Rights are asserted firmly and peacefully—not forcefully. But assertion begins with knowledge that I hope readers learned today.

Comments to chiefjusticepanganiban@hotmail.com

RECOGNITION CORNER

Rotarian Lance Tan Recognized as one of the SKAL Awardees at the 32nd SKAL Tourism Personality Awards



Rtn. Lance Tan was recognized as one of the SKAL Awardees at the 32nd SKAL Tourism Personality Awards last February 26, 2026 at the Grand Ballroom of OKADA Manila in Parañaque City. Philippine Amusement and Entertainment Corporation where he is President and CEO won as the Best Entertainment and Amusement Entity.

SKAL awardees Crystal Jacinto of Villa Medica, PAGCOR chairman Al Tengco, Cynthia Carrion (representing Carlos Yulo), Takako Okada of Okada Manila, Ansett GM Ren Locsin (representing Seferina Joven), acting head and deputy COO of the Tourism Promotions Board Teresita Landan, Alliance Global Group Inc. president and CEO Kevin Tan, Kyle "Kulas" Jennerman and Lance Tan of Lakbay Museo PH (Photo credit: The Philippine STAR)





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RCM OFFICE

543 Arquiza St. cor. Grey St.
Ermita, Manila
Tel. No. 8527-1885
Email: rcmanila@rcmanila.org

www.rcmanila.org