

# THE MANILA STANDARD

## Duterte after six months

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In his first six months, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte is a success story—on the anti-drugs and anti-crime front.

Duterte's Drugs War has made the Philippines at the center of the global campaign against illegal drugs—a menace that no country has ever succeeded in solving.

However, in the Philippines, and this is more significant, Duterte's bloody drugs war has marvelously brought crime rates down and tremendously improved peace and order in many places, nationwide. For the first time in a long time, Filipinos feel safe in their homes, on the streets, and in their places of work.

Of course, the Duterte Drugs War has made him the new contravida of the world. He is ranked by foreign media in the same league as the notorious leaders Saddam Hussein and Muammar Khadaffy. The December 7 extended New York Times half front page story (plus a full inside page pictorial and *pasa*) on Duterte's drugs war is typical of the foreign press reporting that shames both Duterte and the Philippines. In retort, "I am not a killer," the President told outstanding Filipinos the other night.

On two other issues—economic inclusion and fighting corruption, Duterte's record is paltry at best. Little is known about achievements, if any, on these two fronts. Perhaps we are being unfair to the President for wanting quick results on the economic benefits from his stewardship and from his fighting corruption.

After all, curbing corruption in the Philippines is like Hercules cleaning the Augean stables in the 3rd Century AD. To clean the stables which had thousands of animals and had not been cleaned for 30 years, Hercules merely diverted the massive waters of the rivers Aipeus and Peneus and lo and behold, he did a better job than Malabanan could in cleaning one stinking sewage line. But then even the fabled waters of Magat and Bicol are probably not enough to clean the bureaucracy even if ailing Duterte had the strength to divert them to every orifice of government.

What is clear though among businessmen is that they find Duterte personally honest and full of integrity, and as far as fighting drug addicts and drug lords are concerned, he is full of laser-sharp focus and single-mindedness.

What is not clear is whether this sense of presidential integrity and competence filters down to his Cabinet and to the third and lower levels of government bureaucracy.

Traffic is worse today than it was six months ago. From the Pag-IBIG office on Shaw Boulevard to Shangri-La Mall at the corner of Edsa and Shaw, a driver takes at least 45 minutes to cover a distance of less than three kilometers. My friend, Jun Icban, the chief editor of mass circulation Bulletin, told me it took him two hours to get to Shangri-La Edsa from Project 8 yesterday morning before 10. “During Erap’s time,” he recalled, “it took just 30 minutes.”

In Metro Manila, the people managing traffic are veritable sadists, although the head of the Metro Manila Development Authority, the ever-gentle Tim Orbos, is a confirmed former seminarian. He is God-fearing. They have the habit of making life difficult for both motorists and pedestrians. It seems to me they envy that motorists own cars and that pedestrians have a job to commute to daily.

San Miguel Corp. president Ramon S. Ang took a drive three days ago from Buendia in Makati to Plaza Dilao in Manila. He found the traffic lights at four major intersections not all synchronized—meaning one has to stop at every traffic light (and each stop takes ten minutes), instead of making a single go of the entire short route (3.76 kms) in one green light in five minutes. SMC is building a connector road between Buendia and Balintawak, what is called Skyway 3.

RSA promises to nearly complete the entire 14.82-km six-lane span by 2017 so that what currently takes a motorist to traverse in three hours will take only ten minutes at 80 kph speed. SMC is rushing the elevated expressway even if cost has escalated from P26.6 billion originally to P47 billion upon completion. Eventually, RSA plans to operate a bus rapid transit system to ease traffic in the metropolis. It will integrate with a rapid transit bus system from Balintawak to Susana Heights in Muntinlupa City on his elevated South Expressway or Skyway over 36 kms, with stops at major towns, cities or landmarks.

Each rapid transit bus will carry 260 passengers—50 seated, 110 standing, and will stop at special elevated ramps where 260 passengers can board in two minutes and another 260 passengers can disembark, also in two minutes, at the same time. The cost of the ride: just P20. RSA estimates his bus rapid transit system can service up to 300,000 passengers daily, thus relieving Edsa half of its daily load. The cost of installing the system? An incredibly cheap P50 million. “It can replace the non-working MRT3,” RSA smiles.

Meanwhile, at the LTO, one still cannot get a plastic driver’s license pronto. One still cannot get a car plate after registering his vehicle.

Did you know that on Recto and Quezon Avenues at the Central Market in Manila, one can get an authentic-looking driver's license, its serial number even embossed, in just ten minutes? The plastic card is fake but what the heck, it's handy, especially when confronted by a corrupt traffic enforcer in the dark. How come boys in short pants and without slippers can produce decent driver's licenses without hassle and LTO men, dapper in barong and suits and surrounded by stern-looking subalterns and pretty secretaries, cannot?

Many agencies remain cesspools of corruption. Just look at agencies under the Department of Justice, specifically the Bureau of Immigration and the National Penitentiary.

How can it happen that two deputies of BI, both appointed by Duterte and so-called fraternity brods, get involved in a P50-million bribery scandal involving a foreigner online illegal gambling lord? Isn't five months on the job too early to make hay while the sun shines?

Have you ever tried getting a business permit with local governments? It's business as usual. Still too many forms to fill out, too many requirements to comply with, too many steps to undertake, too many government people to sign papers, and too much time to spend to do all these things. The average, in my experience, is a minimum of one month. The global standard for the best by local governments—ten minutes.