

CENTER FOR LIBERALISM & DEMOCRACY

# plaza MIRANDA

2ND QUARTER 2026 | ISSUE # 1



# HINDI PISISIL!



# Editor's Message

On 19 January 1946, Manuel A. Roxas founded the Liberal Party after a most harrowing period of Philippine history.

December 7, 1941 was famously declared as the "Day of Infamy" by American President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Ten hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese invasion of the Philippines commenced. More than a million Filipinos died during the Pacific War with roughly 100,000 men, women and children perishing during the Battle of Manila alone, which lasted for only 27 days in 1945 prior to Liberation.

Roxas was elected president on 4 July 1946 which also marked the birth of the Third Philippine Republic. Since then, the Liberal Party has produced three more presidents. If Roxas and his successor, Elpidio Quirino, were credited with the rebuilding the nation from the ashes of war, the administration of Benigno Simeon "Noy" Aquino, III from 2010 to 2016 restored democratic institutions and public trust, and inspired collective hope and goodwill.

Good governance and accountability, integrity in public service, strong institutions, and political will translated to economic progress. In 1953, the last year of the Quirino administration, the Philippines was considered the second wealthiest and most industrialized nation in Asia, trailing only Japan. The Aquino government transformed the country from the "sick man of Asia" into a "rising tiger", marked by a 6.2% average GDP growth—sound fiscal management tempered with social safety nets and programs aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty. The corrupt and murderous Duterte regime which succeeded squandered all these economic and democratic gains, as well as international prestige.

But it was during the times when it was in the opposition that the Liberal Party showed its true grit and mettle.

The Party was in the forefront in the resistance against Martial Law, many paying the ultimate price for their conviction, foremost of whom was LP Secretary General, Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr. Aquino's martyrdom

spurred national revulsion and worldwide condemnation that culminated in the People Power Revolution of 1986.

The late Senate and LP President, Jovito Salonga, risked his presidential bid as he campaigned for the abrogation of the US-Bases Treaty. Salonga, Wigberto Tañada, Victor Ziga, and other senators were vindicated with their decision as the removal of the US Bases in the country and their conversion to civilian use resulted to impressive economic benefits. For example, the Clark and Subic Freeport Zones remain as the primary anchors of the Luzon Economic Corridor (LEC) contributing billions to the national treasury, employing more than three hundred thousand individuals, and catalyzing regional economic activity.

During the misogynist reign of Duterte, the most prominent women Liberals, particularly Vice President Leni Robredo and Senator Leila de Lima, were subjected to systematic harassment, with De Lima becoming a political prisoner for almost seven years.

Liberals from amongst its grassroots—the local chapters—marched through the streets of Metro Manila and other cities nationwide to protest human rights violations, lawfare, and other policies meant to weaken democratic institutions and penalize political dissent.

Aside from overt acts of persecution, well-funded and sophisticated disinformation apparatus have been employed against the Party and other progressive forces of the country. For the last eight decades, the stalwarts and membership of the Liberal Party have remained steadfast. Anchored on firm ideological foundations, Liberals continue trekking the right path even if it means the greatest sacrifices and the least personal benefits.

**JOHN JOSEPH S. CORONEL**

President, Center for Liberalism and Democracy  
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**ISSN: 27894204**

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# WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE DURING THE OIL CRISIS?

By Dennis M. Arroyo

The war on Iran has led to economic harm far beyond the horrific prices at the pump. First, here is an overview.

**Think jobs.** During times of crisis, businessmen are spooked and postpone their investments. Families cut down on consumption. Big spending falls hit like a row of dominoes because of “Keynesian” multiplier effects: Consumer A buys less from Retailer B who buys less from Wholesaler C who buys less from Producer D. Then some OFWs in the Middle East choose to go home to escape war danger. These all worsen unemployment.

**Then the exchange rate.** The peso had fallen to a historic low of P60 to the US dollar. During crisis days investors flee to buying safe assets, like those denominated in US dollars. That raises demand for US dollars. And because oil is much more expensive and is denominated in dollars, oil companies here have to spend more dollars to import oil. The greater demand for dollars in turn boosts the price of the dollar in peso terms.

As dollars become more expensive, imports become more costly. This adds to general inflation. The inflation rate was only 2.4% in February, 2026. It has risen to 4.1% in March and should go up further in April.



Photo via Maria Tan | ABS-CBN News.

**Food inflation.** Price spikes will be felt more keenly in food. Fishermen need fuel to power their boats. Chemical fertilizer is petroleum-based, so this may cramp crop yields. Food supply chains need fuel to transport produce, meat, and grocery items. The surge in LPG costs will push carinderias and canteens to raise their prices.

Food inflation in the Philippines in 2026 was low at 1.8% in February. That rose to 3.0% in March. This is a critical variable because it matters most to the poor. The November 2025 Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey shows that 20.1% of Filipino families experienced involuntary hunger (hungry and having nothing to eat at least once in the past three months). It is dreadful to speculate how bad hunger will be when the crisis peaks.

Will Bangko Sentral respond to inflation by hiking interest rates? Normally it would not, as the inflation is “cost-push.” That is, it is being driven by rising pump prices, rather than “demand-pull” or by a buying spree in say, real estate. But if inflation reaches dangerous levels, Bangko Sentral may be forced to raise interest rates to control it.



Photo via EPA.

Government will have to spend more, to widen the social safety nets. They may end up swelling the national government deficit. Before the Pandemic, the deficit was 3% of Gross Domestic Product.

As a result of the Pandemic, it ballooned and is at 5.5% as of 2025. Every time government posts a deficit, the shortfall is added to the national debt. So the Iran crisis will give a new big headache to the nation's fiscal managers.

## Government's Response



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. declared a state of national emergency in March 2026 to coordinate agencies against the fuel crisis. In fact, the Philippines was the first country in the world to declare a state of emergency.

Executive Order 110 allows faster deployment of subsidies, emergency procurement, and stricter monitoring of fuel distribution. It authorizes the Department of Energy (DOE) to tap the 60-day oil buffer and to secure alternative imports.

Authorities are diversifying imports by sourcing from states beyond the Middle East. The first shipment of 700,000 barrels of oil from Russia has arrived.

Nationwide energy conservation campaigns are boosting carpooling and energy efficiency in workplaces and households.

The government announced a four-day work week to reduce fuel consumption. Agencies are adopting remote work where possible. These measures aim to cut commuting costs and ease

demand for gasoline and diesel.

The state is promoting the use of public transportation.

As of this writing the government is studying a cut on the VAT and excise taxes for fuel products to ease price pressures.

Emergency subsidies for public transport operators are being rolled out. Over 245,000 drivers nationwide began receiving direct cash assistance, funded by a ₱2.5 billion subsidy program. These workers drive jeepneys, tricycles, buses, vans, and delivery motorcycles.

## The Pros and Cons of the Options

Some comments on these measures are in order.

Energy conservation campaigns like carpooling and reduced travel are symbolic rather than substantive, with limited enforcement. Middle-class households may comply, but poorer families relying on public transport have little flexibility. While laudable, they have a minimal effect on total demand for oil.

A four-day work week and work-from-home arrangements are helpful in the short run. But accept the losses in school learning and in work productivity.

Promoting public transportation is correct. However, the massive crowding at the MRT and LRT stations shows the need to deploy more trains.

Suspension of the VAT on fuel products can ease some inflation at the pump. It can bring quick relief. However this results in high revenue losses. It also works against the poor. The suspension could result in ₱121.4 billion in

revenue losses from excise taxes and ₱14.6 billion from VAT. Remember that tax revenue is meant to fund public education, public health, public infrastructure. Take away that money and apply it to the pump, and wealthier households benefit more since they consume more fuel (6% of Filipinos own cars, 12% in Metro Manila).

Research by Prof. Jan Carlo Punongbayan of the UP School of Economics finds, “the bottom 30 percent of households capture only 17 percent of forgone gasoline excise revenue and 2.5 percent of forgone diesel excise revenue, while the top 30 percent capture 48 percent and 85 percent, respectively.” It is better to target the money to public transport workers rather than have much of it leak to richer families.

Targeted subsidies should ensure though that master lists are carefully crafted. Haphazard lists may exclude some drivers, making them suffer. Beware also of leakages or politicization.

University of the Philippines Prof. Solita Monsod has proposed a temporary *wealth tax*—a tax on the ultra-rich—to create a fund that would cushion poor households from the oil crisis. She argues this is a fairer than suspending fuel taxes, which disproportionately benefit wealthier car owners.

However, the wealth tax is complex with the administrative burden of identifying, valuing, and taxing wealth accurately. Unlike income taxes, wealth taxes require detailed assessments of assets (real estate, shares, businesses), which the Philippines does not track efficiently. The country's limited digital infrastructure and enforcement gaps make it especially difficult. This is more a longer-term solution.

Some have suggested price controls. These have the record of unleashing shortages, and it is easy to see why. Suppose diesel is being sold at P150 per liter, and 30 million liters are bought at that price. Then government sets a price cap of P100 per liter. Demand for diesel will surge to say, 40 million liters. At the same time, petrol stations will sell less diesel, knowing that they are getting the short end of the stick. They sell only 15 million liters.

You now have a shortage: 40 million liters demanded minus 15 million liters supplied, or a 25 million liter deficiency. Who will get more of the limited 15 million supplied? Probably the well-connected.

Others have called for nationalizing Petron to ensure government control over pricing. However, artificial prices due to political pressure have consistently led to shortages. State-owned firms are also known for their inefficiency. Subsidizing Petron is a fiscal burden on taxpayers. The move also requires billions in buyout costs.

A similar drive is to repeal the Oil Deregulation Law (1998). This would entail a return to price controls. Government would set fuel prices, which risks being politically motivated rather than market-based. Again, artificially low prices lead to fuel shortages and budget deficits as subsidies are required. It would discourage investment and competition. Deregulation attracted new players, increasing supply options. Repeal could deter investors wary of government intervention.

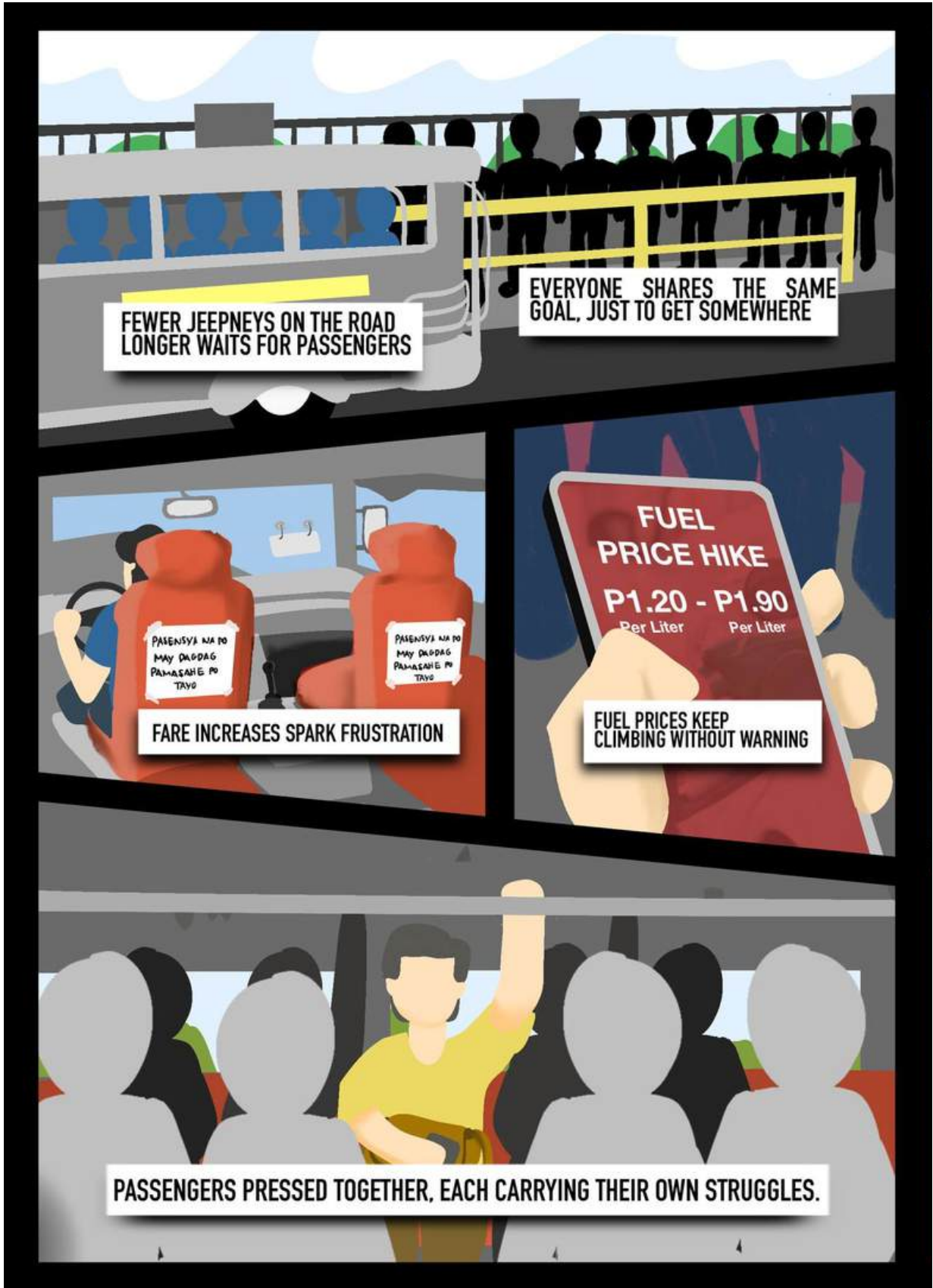
Then there is the biofuels option. This will ease fuel prices a bit. The economic tradeoff is that this will raise the price of sugar (due to the alcohol fuel blends) and cooking oil (due to the coconut oil additive). Let engineers comment on the technical viability of this path.

**All told, the most pro-poor spending measure is to target subsidies for public transportation drivers.**

Public resources are limited and must be spent judiciously. All the more so when it is not clear when the war will end. The nightmare scenario is to have the Treasury near empty at the time when social protection is most needed.



Dennis M. Arroyo was the former Director for National Planning and Policy of the then NEDA. He was key in analytical research for the nation's main anti-poverty programs as a consultant of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and Social Weather Stations. He was a Visiting Fellow in Stanford University.





# WHY PROTECTING WOMEN IN POLITICS IS LONG OVERDUE

By Mara Cepeda

Philippines Correspondent, The Straits Times

I did not have to think twice when I was asked to moderate a panel on violence against women in politics.

The panel discussion on March 26 was organized by the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, the Center for Liberalism and Democracy, the Liberal Party of the Philippines, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation – institutions I have intersected with over the years as a political reporter.

Onstage with me were women whose work I had either closely followed or come to know more deeply in preparing for the discussion: Mamamayang Liberal Representative Leila de Lima; Michelle Wu, Deputy Director for the Department of Youth Development of the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan; and Thai youth

politician and cultural figure V Srivarathanabul, also known as BadBitchBKK.

I covered De Lima during the Rodrigo Duterte presidency, when she was detained on drug charges that have since been dismissed, and repeatedly subjected to sexualized attacks for her opposition to his bloody drug war that killed thousands.

Reading up on Wu's work in Taiwan and V's unconventional campaign that brought culture and politics together, it became clear that this was a conversation that cut across borders.

**Across Asia, we often talk about democratic resilience. But one of its clearest stress tests is how women are treated in politics.**

**Violence against women in politics is not only physical. It takes the form of disinformation, harassment, and attempts to silence women simply for showing up and speaking out. When that becomes normalized, it does not just push women out; it weakens democracy itself.**

**That pattern was particularly stark during the Duterte years in the Philippines.**

Women who were critical of the administration — from journalists like my ex-boss, Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, to De Lima, to then-vice president and now Naga City Mayor Leni Robredo — were often subjected to sexualized attacks meant to undermine their credibility.

It created a chilling effect, not just for those targeted, but for those watching.

I experienced this myself early in my career at Rappler, when a rape threat sent to me via Messenger was specific enough to trigger security protocols at work. The account disappeared before we could

pursue a case. What remained was the message: *you can be present, but you will be made to feel unsafe.*

This is precisely the kind of environment that the proposed **Prevention of Violence Against Women in Politics Act** seeks to address.

Authored principally by De Lima and backed by 41 other lawmakers across party lines, House Bill No. 8393 is an attempt to recognize and confront a form of violence that has long been normalized in Philippine politics.

The bill does something



Photo via Bayi, Inc. Facebook Page.

existing laws do not: **it explicitly defines violence against women in politics as a distinct offense.** It acknowledges that women in public life – candidates, elected officials, political staff, and even campaign workers – face targeted attacks designed to push them out of the political space.

It proposes concrete protections, like mechanisms for reporting and redress, obligations for political parties to create safer environments, and accountability for those who enable or amplify abuse, including actors in digital spaces.

It also recognizes the range of harm involved, from psychological abuse and sexual harassment, to economic coercion and coordinated online attacks – all of which are used to undermine women’s credibility and participation.

This matters because existing frameworks fall short.

Laws like the Magna Carta of Women and the Safe Spaces Act address gender-based violence in general terms, but they do not fully capture how these attacks operate in political life, especially during campaigns.

During the panel discussion, it was clear that this is not unique to the Philippines.

In Taiwan, Wu pointed out that even with relatively high representation, women in politics are still judged against expectations that have little to do with governance.

“That is the obstacle that women in politics in Taiwan are facing – that we are expected by the society to be a mother, a wife, or a caretaker more than being ourselves in our career,”



Wu said. “We are facing the dilemma of choosing between [being a career woman or a homemaker], and this kind of dilemma is not faced by male politicians”.

In Thailand, V described being reduced to her appearance in political coverage.

“The world sees my gender before whatever I choose to do,” she said.

V recalled that one of her first appearances in Thai media was in a segment ranking female candidates based on their looks.

“You can probably imagine the comment sections: a lot of bullying, a lot of objectification. But hey, at least it was a straightforward version of sexism,” she said.

**Different contexts, same underlying dynamic:**

**women are evaluated on terms that men are not.**

Asked why this persists, De Lima was direct, saying “it is both cultural and political.”

“It's part of the game. They belittle women. They begrudge women. They try to isolate her. They try to attack her. Every time she achieves something very meaningful in her work, especially in politics, we women in politics are often subjected to harassment,” said De Lima.

Legislation alone cannot change that.

As the panel discussion made clear, there are limits to what laws can do. Taiwan's experience shows that representation does not automatically translate to equality.

In Thailand, enforcement remains a challenge, with women often reluctant to pursue cases for fear of being labelled as weak.

But without legislation, there is little to fall back on.

Recognizing violence against women in politics as a distinct and punishable offense is a necessary step not just for protection, but for accountability.

Looking back, what stood out most to me was not just the consistency of the

experiences shared by De Lima, Wu, and V, but the persistence behind them.

Despite the scrutiny, the harassment, and the risks, women continue to step forward.

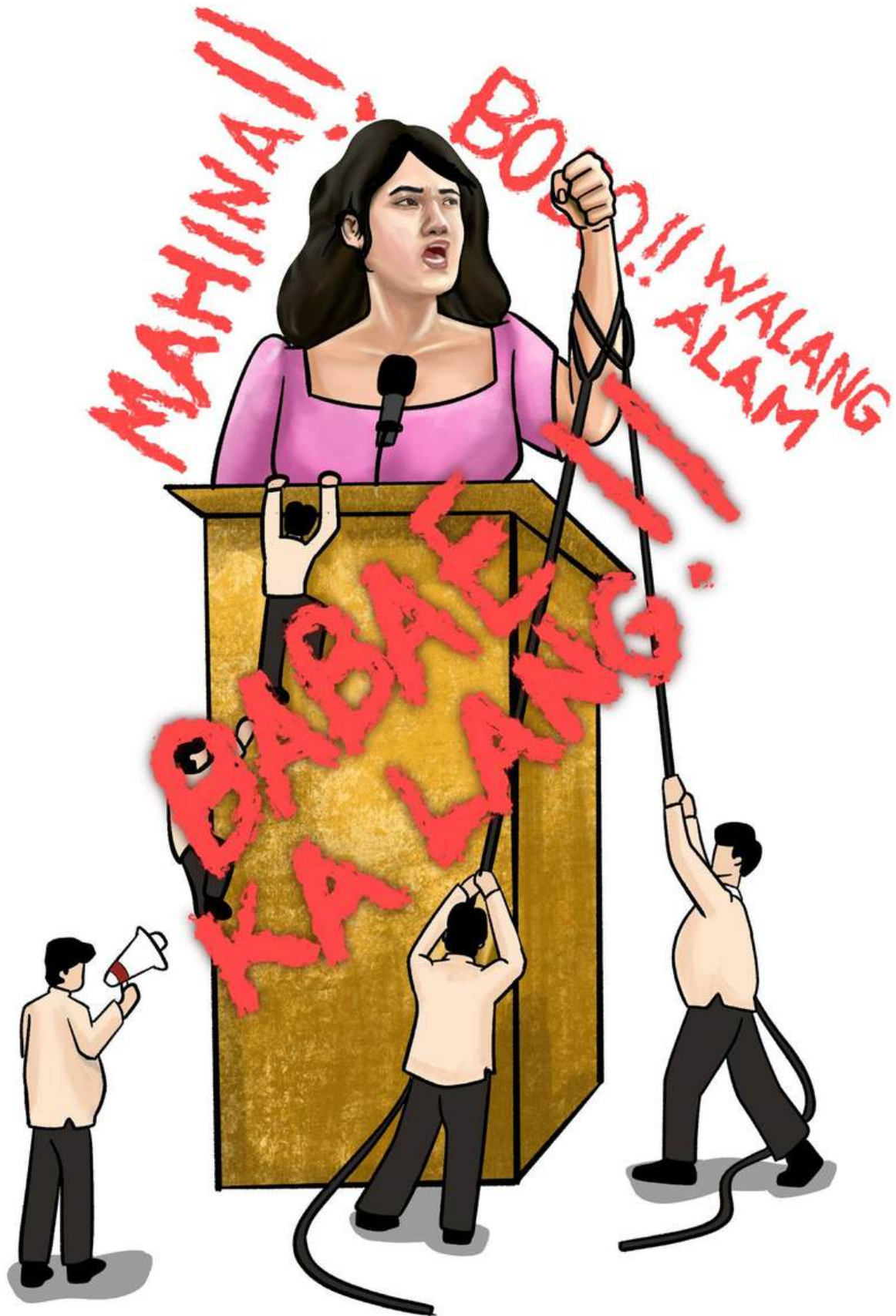
**“Where women endure, democracy endures,” De Lima said.**

It is a hopeful line, but also a demanding one.

Because if participating in public life means navigating threats, harassment, and constant attempts to discredit you, then something is fundamentally broken.

**Protection of women in politics isn't a privilege, but the baseline for participation. Without it, democracy weakens and falls short of representing those it is meant to serve.**

And unless that changes, the burden will continue to fall on women to endure what the system refuses to fix.



ARTWORK by Daniel Adelantar

# LIBERAL PARTY @80

*Liberals Celebrate Eight Decades of Freedom and Democracy*



**“Sa nagdaang walong dekada, pinanghawakan natin ang paniwalang: lumalaban tayo hindi dahil sa kasiguruhan ng panalo, kundi sa tibay ng ating pananalig—sa ating sarili at sa taumbayan na taos-pusong nagpahiram ng lakas.”**

**Sen. Francis Kiko Pangilinan**  
Party Chair Emeritus



**“Eighty years is not proof of moral superiority, but proof that a political institution can outlast personalities if it learns when to adapt and when to hold its ground. The Liberal Party has endured because it has known the difference between the two. Patuloy tayong kikilos nang may disiplina, at may malinaw at mabuting layunin. Para sa kapwa at bansa, hindi pasisiil.”**



**Rep. Leila M. De Lima**  
Party Chairperson

“As we mark eighty years of the Liberal Party, we move ahead guided by what has shaped us from the beginning: a commitment to voice, a practice of solidarity, and the conviction that democratic life is strengthened when citizens and institutions refuse to be silenced. **Hindi Pasisil.**”

**Atty. Erin Tañada**  
Party President



“Sinasaksak natin ang ating mga sarili sa kasaysayan. At kasama ang mamamayan, hinuhubog natin ang kasaysayan ng Pilipinas para yung tunay na kalayaan, yung tunay na demokrasya, ay manaig sa ating lipunan.”

**Atty. Kit Belmonte**  
Party Secretary-General



# COUNTERING DEMOCRATIC DECLINE IN ASIA



## Acceptance Speech as newly elected Chair of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats

(27 March 2026, Manila)

by f/Sec Florencio “Butch” Abad

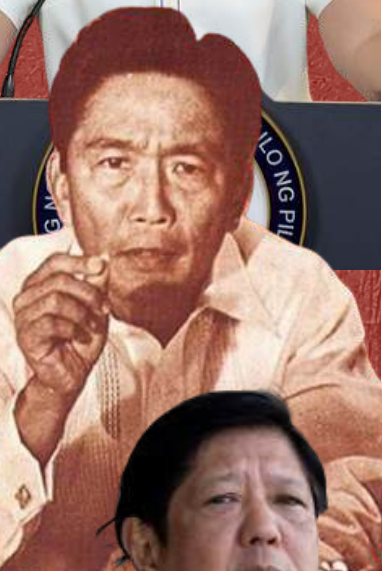
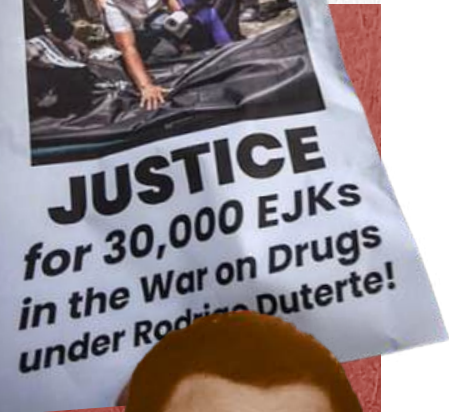
My fellow Liberals,

I accept this responsibility with deep gratitude—and with a profound sense of history.

This is my second time to serve as Chairman of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats. The first time was in 1999–2000, at the dawn of a new millennium.

Back then, the world seemed to be on the side of liberal democracy.

The Cold War had ended. Authoritarian regimes were retreating. Across continents, democracy was expanding. Globalization was knitting economies together. There was a widespread belief—perhaps even a quiet confidence—that liberal democracy was not only ascendant, but inevitable, the final form of human government, as Francis Fukuyama crystallized in his essay, “The End of History”.



Even in our region, despite our struggles, we believed we were part of that forward march.

Yes, we faced corruption, weak institutions, and political instability. In my own country, the Philippines, we were on the brink of a constitutional crisis. But even then, we believed that democracy, though imperfect, could correct itself.

We believed that history was bending—slowly, unevenly—but bending toward freedom.

### **Will democracy survive**

Today, in 2026, we meet in a very different world.

The question is no longer whether democracy will expand.

The question is whether democracy will survive.

In his recent article in the Financial Times, “We must grasp the peril for democracy,” Martin Wolf warns us that democracy is

now in grave and global danger—not just in fragile states, but in the very countries that once stood as its strongest defenders.

We are witnessing the rise of elected authoritarianism.

We see the erosion of institutions.

We face the weaponization of information.

We confront deepening inequality.

And we witness the collapse of democratic norms.

And now, we face a new and powerful force that did not exist in 2000:

### **Artificial intelligence**

AI can supercharge disinformation, enable surveillance, and concentrate power.

But it can also expand knowledge, improve governance, and empower citizens.

The question is not whether AI will shape democracy.

It is whether democracy will shape AI.

My friends,

If the challenge in 2000 was to build democracy, the challenge in 2026 is to defend it—and renew it in a digital, disrupted world. And here in Southeast Asia, the stakes are even higher.

We should be concerned about:

The normalization of corruption and impunity

The capture of the state by elites

The collapse of truth in the digital and AI-driven space

The rise of digital authoritarianism

And the growing disconnect between democracy and delivery

## But There Is Also Hope

**Because alongside these dangers, we are witnessing something powerful—**

something that should give us reason not just for concern, but for confidence.

Across our regions and beyond, a new generation is rising.

In Indonesia, South Korea, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Morocco, we have seen young people—Gen Z and millennials—take to the streets, organize online, and mobilize communities.

They have challenged corruption.

They have demanded accountability.

They have helped bring down governments and reshape political orders.

**They are not passive citizens.**

**They are agents of democratic disruption  
—and renewal.**

They bring with them:

- Idealism in the face of cynicism
- Energy in the face of fatigue
- And technological fluency in a digital age

But let us be clear:

Their energy alone is not enough.

If we do not engage them, organize with them, and empower them— others will.

And not all who seek to mobilize them stand for democracy.

### **What Then Must We Do**

If we are to meet this moment, liberal democrats in Asia must focus on six urgent priorities:

#### ***First: Restore Integrity in Public Finance and Governance***

We must defend the public purse.

Accountability is the foundation of democracy.

#### ***Second: Rebuild and Protect Democratic Institutions***

Without strong institutions, democracy cannot endure.

#### ***Third: Defend Truth in the Age of AI***

We must confront disinformation and ensure that technology strengthens—not destroys—public reason.

#### ***Fourth: Prevent the Abuse of Technology***

We must resist digital authoritarianism and ensure democratic oversight of AI and surveillance.

#### ***Fifth: Make Democracy Deliver***

Democracy must improve lives—reduce inequality, expand opportunity, and restore dignity.





Photo via Official Gazette.

***Sixth: Invest in the Next Generation of Democratic Citizens***

We must do more than inspire the youth—we must partner with them.

We must:

- Open political spaces to young leaders
- Equip them with civic and digital literacy
- Support their organizing and participation
- Build their capacity to wield power and govern
- And trust them not just as voters—but as co-creators of democracy



Photo via Shuhei de Belen | TomasinoWeb.

**From People Power, we must build Civic Power—  
intergenerational, digital, and enduring.**

## Closing

My friends,

In 2000, we believed democracy was the future.

In 2026, we must fight to ensure it still is.

But let us not lose sight of this:

The story of democracy has never been written by institutions alone.

It has always been written by people—

by citizens who refused to give up,

by movements that refused to be silenced,

by generations that chose courage over fear.

Today, that responsibility is ours.

And it is theirs—the young—who are ready to carry it forward.

Let us stand with them.

Let us learn from them.

Let us build with them.

**And together, let us ensure that democracy does not merely survive—**

**But is renewed, reimagined, and made worthy of the future.**

**Thank you.**





## CENTER FOR LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Born of the need for a liberal foundation that primarily serves the needs of the Liberal Party of the Philippines in terms of policy and research as well as training and capacity building, the Center for Liberalism and Democracy shall also serve as a nexus for local and international networks, and development agencies.

CLD aims to promote and advocate the liberal principles of freedom and democracy; justice, social equity and human rights; and inclusive and sustainable development.

It builds alliances and solidarity with like-minded organizations including political parties, civil society movements, corporations and corporate foundations, government agencies, media, and academia in the Philippines, Asia and the rest of the globe.

The Center seeks to, among others,

- 1) participate in the review and formulation of pertinent policies in the realms of party platforms, legislative agenda, public and academic discourses, and the like;
- 2) heighten the people's awareness of their civil, political and human rights as well as the political, economic and socio-cultural institutions and processes and power structures; and
- 3) capacitate and empower people to enable them to actively participate in governance, and social policies that affect their lives.