

Column for Business Mirror
MANNY VILLAR
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The Entrepreneur

Of Movers and Shakers

THERE'S something going on that is distinctly exciting in contrast to the state and forecasts on the economy.

The economic stance is not exciting at all. It is generally conservative, with the growth consensus at a modest 4.2 percent to 4.8 percent for this year. Even the government's target of 5 percent to 6 percent is not really exciting when you compare it with our neighbors' 6 percent to 9 percent in terms of gross domestic product (GDP).

What is distinctly exciting is coming from the private sector, where the "movers and shakers" are engaged in almost dizzying frenzy of acquisitions, investments, partnerships and competition not seen before. Oh, by the way, a "mover and shaker," as defined by an online dictionary, "is a highly respected, key figure in a particular area with a lot of influence and importance."

Right now, the most visible in the business arena are Ramon S. Ang, president and COO of the diversifying conglomerate San Miguel Corp. (SMC); and Manuel V. Pangilinan of the Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd. and its local units, mainly Metro Pacific Investments Corp. and Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.

Incidentally, we congratulate Mr. Pangilinan for being named "Best Chief Executive Officer in Asia" in the 12th annual poll of Asia's top companies by FinanceAsia.

Ang and Pangilinan are, indeed, "movers and shakers," that is, they are "highly respected, key figures with a lot of influence and importance" in our business world. Ang, in tandem with SMC Chairman and CEO Danding Cojuangco, has turned the food, beverage and packaging company into a giant player in the energy (oil refining and retailing, power generation and distribution), mining (coal) and infrastructure (Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway, Skyway and MRT 7).

San Miguel's \$500-million investment (good for a 49-percent stake) in Philippine Airlines and its low-cost carrier affiliate Air Philippines is a good addition to SMC's airport development project in Caticlan, gateway to Boracay.

Pangilinan, on his part, has led PLDT and MPIC, which he both chairs, into mining (Philex Mining and Philex Petroleum), tollways (North Luzon Expressway and Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway), electricity distribution (Manila Electric Co.), water utility (Maynilad Water Services) and hospitals (Makati Med, Cardinal Santos, Asian Hospital).

Both Ang and Pangilinan seem to be in a race to gobble up other businesses. Pangilinan, who has acquired TV5, has confirmed interest in buying GMA Network. A few days after San Miguel's investment in PAL came out in the news, Ang was reported as having said he was looking at new investments in the energy sector outside the Philippines (SMC's Petron has completed the acquisition of US-based Exxon's downstream business in Malaysia).

Their plans are getting bolder and bolder. Ang reportedly plans to build a new international airport that is much bigger than Naia (four runways instead of Naia's one runway) but still in Metro Manila.

While they seem to be competing fiercely, Ang and Pangilinan are actually teaming up in some areas, like the recent tie-up between Ayala Corp. and MPIC. They will jointly participate in the bidding for the 10 railway projects in Metro Manila, starting with the

P60-billion LRT 1 extension that add 11.7 kilometers to the existing LRT 1 line and extend its reach from Baclaran in Parañaque City to Bacoor in Cavite.

So, seemingly they have a rivalry, which we like to think is a friendly one.

But they are not the only ones creating ripples, even waves of excitement in Philippine business. Aside from its joint venture with the Pangilinan group, Ayala recently announced plans to pour about P60 billion to revitalize Makati City and retain its reputation as host to the most number of corporate headquarters. It seems the country's oldest conglomerate has suddenly woke up from slumber and is telling everyone it's back in the game.

Also playing in the current exciting game is the SM group, which is not resting on its crown as biggest retailer as it continues to build malls in the Philippines and in China.

Others will not be left behind. George S.K. Ty only recently listed his GT Capital Holdings; international port operator Ricky Razon is going into tourism with his Bloomberry; and, of course, we have Andrew Tan in the BPO, tourism and fast-food businesses.

Readers of my columns may ask: "What's your point?"

Let's talk about it next week.

You may send your comments/feedback to mbvillar_comments@yahoo.com.

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