

Column for Business Mirror
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The Entrepreneur

Of Movers and Shakers – Part 2

One of the latest developments in the business big league was the decision of the government last week to allow both Manny V. Pangilinan and Ramon S. Ang to build two highway systems that will link the North and South Expressways. The combined cost of the two projects, which will take two years to complete, is estimated at P60 billion.

Metro Pacific Tollways, a subsidiary of Pangilinan's Metro Pacific Investments Corp., will build a 13.2-kilometer connector road that runs from C-3 in Caloocan City to Buendia in Makati. San Miguel Corp., which has acquired a stake in Skyway operator Citra Metro Manila Tollways, plans to extend the Skyway from Buendia to Balintawak, the entry point to the North Luzon Expressway. Of course, both proposals, being unsolicited, will be subjected to a Swiss challenge to allow other prospective investors to present their own proposals.

So the plans of the movers and shakers are getting bolder and bolder. In my view, they are adding spice to our economy and providing excitement. At the same time, they are challenging the other major players to go big time; they are compelled not to be complacent.

I think this is a good way of encouraging other tycoons to be more determined in investing a lot more. Some of these ventures may not succeed, while some may. But, one thing is very clear: excitement is what we need now. And this is one good way of encouraging our entrepreneurs to be more determined, and non-entrepreneurs to be entrepreneurs.

Incidentally, I don't look at the sale of part of Philippine Airlines as a simple unloading on the part of taipan Lucio Tan, one of our most successful businessmen. I believe his partnership with San Miguel is a smart move, like his partnership with Philip Morris, so what may seem as a systematic disposal of assets may turn out to be a brilliant strategy, after all.

This is the kind of scene we like to see. It shows the Philippines is moving forward. It is also my wish that more investors would join and add to the modest frenzy of business activities.

Right now, the movers and shakers are still too few to really move and shake up the economy in a major, major way. I believe that the more excitement we get in the next few years, the faster we will grow.

It would also be good if we have more productive ventures than just buying companies or shares. Still, it's better than no excitement as well.

Hopefully, Ramon S. Ang will be able to improve Philippine Airlines and modernize its fleet to cope with the growing demand for air transportation. And it will also boost tourism. Already, San Miguel is developing an international airport in Caticlan, gateway to Boracay, which is expected to lower the cost of air transportation to the world-famous beach resort.

That's just one benefit from a single deal. The more ventures we have, the more benefits, especially for the people, which brings me to the whole point of this two-part article.

The two north-south highway link projects of Manny V. Pangilinan and Ramon S. Ang will boost the economy, in general, and tourism, in particular. When completed, the two projects will improve the movement of goods and people between northern and southern Luzon, including Metro Manila, hopefully resulting in lower prices for essential goods. The projects will also enhance the connectivity between the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and the Diosdado Macapagal Airport in Pampanga.

The investments of Henry Sy's SM Group, Andrew Tan's Travellers International and Ricky Razon's Bloomberry in the development of entertainment, including hotels in the proposed Pagcor entertainment complex along Manila Bay, will bring in more tourists and create thousands of new jobs, while stimulating other businesses.

Our macro fundamentals like strong inflow of remittances from overseas Filipino workers, the robust business-process outsourcing industry and a resilient banking system, among others, will help us grow higher than the lackluster 3.7 percent posted in 2011.

I don't consider the World Bank's forecast of 4.2 percent or the Asian Development Bank's 4.8 percent as exciting. Hopefully, our movers and shakers will help us achieve a faster and more exciting growth, not just in 2012 but for a long time onward.

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