

MANILA BULLETIN

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MEXICO CITY — I am about to return home after an eventful one-week official trip to Mexico, highlighted by the inaugural of new Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, which I attended as the special envoy of President Benigno S. Aquino III.

Several heads of state and special representatives, including US Vice President Joe Biden and Spain's heir to the throne Prince Felipe, attended the inaugural held on December 1.

Peña Nieto's 13-point agenda for his administration, including education reform, crime prevention, social welfare, and fiscal discipline, was well received. Especially highly applauded were his promises to initiate education reform and make broadband Internet access the right of every Mexican.

During this trip, we also roused enormous interest in the Joint Philippine-Mexican Galleon Museum Project. Madame Margarita Zavala, wife of outgoing President Felipe Calderon, first broached the idea for the project when she visited Manila in November, 2011. I met her again in Mexico, and she maintained her support for the creation of the Galleon Museum in Manila.

Key figures in Mexico's private sector, academe, and parliament expressed their agreement that the Galleon Museum project will reinvigorate the relations between the Philippines and Mexico, and the rest of the Pacific economies, like never before.

The three largest Mexican multinationals have thrown their full support behind the Galleon Museum project in Manila. One is Grupo Carso, the holding company that manages the highly diversified businesses of Carlos Slim Helú, business magnate, philanthropist, and the Forbes-ranked richest person in the world since 2010. I met with Slim's business partner and right-hand man Ignacio Cobo twice during my trip, and he was equally eager to come to Manila to explore opportunities for business in the Philippines. The other two are CEMEX, one of the world's largest cement producers and building materials suppliers, represented by Mr. Fernando Gonzalez; and Coca Cola FEMSA, represented by the Director for Corporate Affairs Mr. Genaro Borrego. Both CEMEX and FEMSA have operations in Manila.

I also met with important academic and cultural leaders. Margarita Orellana, publisher of *Artes de Mexico* magazine, has agreed to dedicate the October, 2013, issue to the Galleon Trade, a collaboration between Filipino and Mexican writers, scholars, and photographers. Among the leading scholars who have committed to the project are Dr. Isabel Monroy of Colegio de San Luis Potosi, President Martin Sanchez Rodriguez of Colegio de Michoacan, and Director General Luis Jauregui of Instituto Mora.

Enrique Krauze, intellectual, historian, and media expert will also begin developing a documentary on the subject, while Dra. Carmen Reyes, geomatics expert, will assist in the

curatorial aspect of the Museum itself.

Further, the State of Guerrero, where Acapulco is located, has pledged its full support to this effort through its Director for Cultural Affairs, Alejandra Frausto. In October of this year, they set up an exciting exhibition on the Galleon Trade legacy, currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum in Manila.

The Galleon Museum will be a fitting centerpiece of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit the Philippines will host in 2015.

For 250 years from the 16th to the 18th century, the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade was the premier vehicle of global trade and commerce. But most importantly, it transcended mercantile motives as the Galleon Trade ultimately facilitated the transmission of culture, ideas, and traditions. A global village made up of 36 of the world's biggest nations was born, with the Pacific as the most important shipping route, and Manila and Acapulco the most important ports.

Many of those Pacific-rim nations are now among the 21 member-economies of the APEC, including Australia, China, Japan, Mexico, Korea, Singapore, and the United States. The Galleon Museum is an emblematic reminder of both shared history and the collective future potential of Pacific nations. The potent emblem will no doubt galvanize all these nations into greater cooperation.

Coincidentally, the APEC Summit in Manila will coincide with milestone year of Southeast Asian integration. When the ASEAN becomes one community, it will have a combined market of 600 million people, plus some of the fastest growing economies in the world.

During my trip, I also met with key political leaders from two of Mexico's three main political parties: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), President Peña Nieto's party, and the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), to which outgoing President Calderon belongs. Among them are Senator Ricardo Garcia Cervantes, Head of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) in Mexico; Senator Gabriela Cuevas, Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; and Senator Laura Roxas, member of the Senate Committee on Anti-corruption and Citizen Participation, all of whom committed to attend the 5th GOPAC Global Conference which will be held in Manila from January 30 to February 2, 2013.

Likewise, Senators Teofilo Torres Corzo and Humberto Mayans, two of the most prominent parliamentarians in Mexico, have expressed their strong support to opening up greater channels of trade between our two countries, making the Philippines Mexico's gateway to Asia, and Mexico our gateway to Latin America.

The Philippine government should match the enthusiasm shown by Mexican leaders when President Peña Nieto comes on an official state visit, possibly next year in a stopover to the APEC Summit in Jakarta, as well as during the 2015 summit in Manila.

Mexico is one of the 15 biggest economies in the world today in terms of GDP. It makes great economic and diplomatic sense to be a partner with an emerging global power, one whose history and culture is so much like ours. Such strong foundation could only yield a strong partnership.

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