

ESSAY

Alternative futures for the Philippines

Sohail Inayatullah

The overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos raised hopes for a better future in the Philippines, but it now seems to many that the people's revolution has not ushered in a new society. This article examines President Aquino's strategy for development alongside others, identified as the self-reliance, leftist and post-industrial models. It is concluded, however, that an authoritarian and élitist future for the Philippines is becoming increasingly likely.

Although former President Marcos still believes that the Philippines belongs to him, his wife and his friends, it appears that the Filipino people, on the street and in the ballot boxes, have spoken. Behind the charismatic leadership of Cory Aquino, the newly legitimated government hopes to develop a humanistic economic system that balances growth with distribution in the political context of an autonomous people's sector that is beholden to neither prince, merchant nor warrior (military or guerrilla).¹

However, while in the first year of the Aquino government there initially appeared a moment of opportunity, a possibility to create through the popular will an entirely other future, it may be that now—two and a half years later—that moment has been lost. For instance, a recent speech by Sister Christine Tan, long-time friend of Aquino, made headlines in the Philippines: 'Cory gov't élitist,

nun says; no services have been rendered to the urban poor from the government in more than a year. . . . Only millionaires can get elected in the Philippines.'²

Thus, many now believe that although aggregate growth rates are hopeful and although Aquino may serve out her term, the people's revolution has not created a new Philippines. Instead, the nation remains in turmoil, impoverished and on the periphery of the world economic system.

Yet Aquino and her cabinet still believe that with fair laws, land reform, an open market and hard work, as well as an expanding world economy, the Philippines too can follow the high growth success of other Pacific Rim nations such as Singapore and South Korea. They hope that through economic growth that benefits the poor and the rich, a middle class can emerge, thus bringing political stability and reducing the appeal of the communists.

There are other compelling perspectives, however. There is the view of developing an economically self-sufficient and politically self-reliant Philippines; a nation that is not fundamentally dependent on the economic

Sohail Inayatullah is a political scientist and futurist who consults with various governmental agencies and educational institutes in Hawaii. He can be contacted at 3059 Maigret Street, Honolulu, HI 96816, USA.

cycles of the developed North. Proponents of this perspective believe that the legacy of colonialism and of land ownership allow only one future—that of self-reliance. This vision of the future is concerned with changing the structure of the economic system, of developing economic cooperatives; establishing floors and ceilings on land ownership and capital accumulation; and realigning the Philippines with its neighbours instead of with global powers such as the USA. Of course, within this perspective there are numerous groups. Some of these are solely concerned with capturing state power, while others are concerned with cultural and spiritual renewal. All, however, are concerned with transforming the debilitating effects of 400 years of foreign control.

To understand the various visions of the Philippines' future, we must first reconstruct the past and understand how the Philippines has arrived at its present impoverished condition.

History

For over 400 years the Philippines, like other peripheral regions, has been controlled by external empires and nation states.³ This control has been military, ideological and economic. First came the Spanish ships; through their superior firepower they quickly defeated the *Datus*, the pre-colonial chieftains. As no Filipino nation had developed—that is, there was no one sovereign king—it was easier for foreigners to impose their own world view on the population as well as to extract raw materials and labour.

Thus the roots of the present distorted human and economic development can be traced to the Spanish, for they did not encourage balanced economic development, indeed they did not allow it. According to political scientist Robert Stauffer, 'Spain's lack of a direct trade route to the Philippines for the first two centuries of colonial rule provided a logistical reason for keeping the Philippines from producing goods for world trade, and keeping it a mere transshipment station for the China–Mexico–Spain flow of high-cost/low-bulk products.'⁴

With the soldiers came the friars, and thus along with domination through

military–technological power came domination through ideological power. Christian priests led this phase of foreign control. Manila was not only the centre of military power, but also the religious centre. The governor general was civil head of the church, but the archbishop vied with him for political supremacy. In the 17th and 18th centuries the archbishop frequently won. Religious orders, Catholic hospitals and schools as well as bishops acquired great wealth—largely in land—through their political and ideological power.

Thus from the era of military control—the era of warriors—the Philippines moved to an era of ideological control—the era of priests. The Christian cross became not the symbol of sacrifice but the symbol of conquest. The priests through a variety of incentives such as the promise of heaven and jobs slowly converted the Filipinos to Christianity. The consequence of this ideological conversion was the development of a collective cultural inferiority complex among the Filipinos. Ancient ways were described as ungodly—that is, they were not part of the God of civilization and progress.

The subsequent era of the Philippines was one of domination by capitalists. These, however, were not Spanish or local Filipino capitalists. While Spain 'lacked the entrepreneurial, administrative and financial resources to capitalize on the rapidly growing Philippine economy' (growth largely through export agriculture) it had laid the infrastructure for capitalist development. According to one summary, '[w]hat Spain had done was to provide the centralized political and administrative structures under which rapid economic change could take place, the legal codes to protect the large landowners, a population largely socialized into a common belief system as a result of the work of the Church, and a class structure that could increasingly produce sufficient products for an expanding export trade'.⁵ British and American capitalists dominated this new phase of Philippine history, beginning in the late 19th century. American capitalists managed to integrate the Philippines into the growing world economy through the sale of sugar (which was subsidized in the American market) and other crops.

Foreign penetration was made possible through the creation and cooptation of élites who internalized the process of domination and aligned themselves with the outside. These élites—largely land-owners, clergy and military—allowed laws that gave Americans equal access and rights to exploit Filipino natural resources. In addition, as their interests were in harmony with those of the foreign capitalists, it was to their benefit to control and to stifle local populist-nationalistic cultural revolts.

After the Second World War economic rights were retained by Americans in exchange for development funds to rebuild the Philippine economy. Thus, although the Philippines gained political liberation, as with other Third World nations the economy maintained its landlord-oriented colonial economic structure. Economic liberation in terms of wealth redistribution or challenging the structural role of the Philippines in the world economy (as raw material supplier, for example) was not pursued.

Of course during this phase of Philippine history there were numerous nationalistic movements that attempted to construct a Philippines for the Filipinos. But each of these movements was defeated by military means (the Huk rebellion, for example) or through cooptation by the ruling élite. Marcos, during his rule, cleverly appropriated the symbols of populism and nationalism while keeping his government authoritarian and allowing the Philippines to be further integrated into the world economy.⁶

Capitalism and the present

Thus the poverty of the Philippines is rooted in its colonial past. As mentioned earlier, since the time of the Spanish the Philippines has had its wealth removed. Raw materials were taken out and sold at great profit, with little of these profits returning to the Philippines. In addition, instead of industries growing around these natural resources and thus providing jobs for local people, manufacturing was done elsewhere. Also, instead of food for local consumption, cash crops were grown with borrowed money, which in global economic downturns caused the landless to become labourless as well.

Finally, instead of an indigenous cultural system growing and supporting Filipino lifestyles and arts, the Philippines has paid homage to the epistemologies and visions of foreign cultures.

Cultural struggle

The key to this economic exploitation has been cultural exploitation. As social philosopher and founder of the Progressive Utilization Theory, P. R. Sarkar, has stated in his *Neo-Humanism: The Liberation of Intellect*: 'If the people's cultural backbone is broken, then all their struggles for political and social freedom will end in nothing. Can those whose necks and backs are crushed under the weight of pseudo-culture (culture that results from foreign domination) be expected to hold their heads high in any sphere of life?'⁷

The problem, from this perspective, has been the legitimization of a structure that does not encourage self-reliance on individual, cultural and economic levels. Instead the structure has reproduced patterns of dominance between centre and periphery, city and village, rich and poor. It is a structure with historical roots that promises riches to all; yet as with the Philippines and other peripheries, only a few have won. The 'others'—the tribals, landless, females, youth, aged, handicapped—must wait for the wealth to trickle down from the capitalists, land-owners and bureaucrats.

Thus the crony capitalism of Marcos is not the problem ultimately. Cory Aquino, however spiritual and moral she may be in her individual actions or spiritual beliefs, cannot solve centuries of misrule, of misuse of natural and human resources. Thus, even though she appears to be a leader who desires neither to dominate nor to control but instead solely to serve selflessly, there remains a history and structure of control by the powerful and wealthy. However, the emergence of people's power initially created the possibility of an autonomous people's sector that was beholden to neither capitalists, communists, military nor bureaucrats. There existed a populism that had the potential to transform the impoverished past and create an altogether new future.

In the past two and a half years Aquino has not been successful in harnessing this

people's power. So far she has not been able to transform the populism of people's power into small people's organizations that can pressurize various special interest groups—the civilian bureaucracy, the military and the capitalists. This populism, manifested through rallies and protests, could have served to keep the fervour of the Filipino revolution alive and to force the corruption of the past to reveal and transform itself.⁸

Instead of populist rallies against corruption, vigilante movements aimed at countering the communist threat have developed. The vigilantes, moreover, have broadened their targets to include church groups, trade union leaders and others who desire a shift from the status quo. All of these groups and individuals have been inaccurately lumped into the category of 'communist'. This escalation of violence has further increased the military leverage on the Aquino government as well as the possibility of a military takeover to restore peace. However, with the inclusion of the military in Aquino's decision-making process, a coup is not imminent. But people's power is no longer evident either.

At a broader level President Aquino is caught in a paradox. To maintain the stability of her government she needs the United States and that nation's bases. Yet these bases further alienate the nationalists and the radical left. In addition, she must implement land reforms to maintain the support of the majority poor. However, redistribution of land is certain to aggravate the military, the landlords and the upper class who have been instrumental in her accession to power. Thus, although she may personally favour fundamental economic changes, she is unable to implement them. Of course, Aquino's recent land reform measures have spread accountability to Congress, thus allowing her to argue that she has done all she can. Interpretation and implementation are now no longer solely her problem.

Her preferred future is a dialectical strategy of growth and distribution. Her government hopes, through foreign borrowing, to buy and redistribute land to the landless and through government spending to provide jobs. On the supply side, Filipino capitalists and those in the military who are wedded to the export-led

development model hope that through the export of raw materials, manufactured textiles and electronic goods and the import of capital, knowledge and high technology, the Philippines will grow. With these export-earned US dollars the government hopes eventually to repay its foreign debt.

Philippine Trade and Industry Secretary José Concepcion has developed a plan to transform the nation into Philippines Inc.⁹ He argues that the Philippines has the strategic location, natural resources and an educated, English-speaking, easily trained labour force to compete with the newly industrializing Pacific Rim nations. The Philippines also enjoys zero- or low-duty access to the US market for more than 6000 products. In addition, the currencies of the growing economies of Korea and Taiwan will be revalued as they move up the ladder in the world economy. This will allow the Philippines to attract further foreign investors. Finally, corporations who left the Philippines because of cronyism and political instability are moving back. Thus, 'it will soon be springtime in Manila'. The 5% growth rate for 1987 supports this argument somewhat.¹⁰ The stock market composite index moved from 148 prior to Marcos's departure to 1333 in July 1987.¹¹ However, in line with other markets, it has since fallen to the 700–800 range.¹² The larger question remains: How much of this new wealth will trickle down to workers and how much of the multinational profits will stay in the country?

Moreover, it can certainly be argued that this export-led growth will be very short lived, that the Philippines will eventually follow the economic downturn of countries such as Singapore, or the anticipated global recession. For the long term, dependence on export-led development is risky, especially when the West itself is suffering a crisis of faith, of legitimacy, when Japan, the USA and others are erecting walls of protectionism. Certainly given the high probability of a global recession in the next few years, Manila's 'springtime' could very easily become a harsh northern winter. For Aquino's strategy to work even in the short term there must be continued global economic expansion: the USA, Japan or other First World powers must expand and buy Filipino goods. Finally, it is important to

remember that the Rim nations who profited from export-led growth did so after land reforms, and did so when the world economy was expanding, and when the USA—to safeguard the world from communism and to spread democracy—made accessible its new technologies, and finally when US domestic demand was expanding.

The poverty of reality and the reality of poverty

'Cory capitalism' is obviously an improvement over crony capitalism for the latter only redistributed profits from entrepreneurial-minded capitalists to intellectual-minded capitalists, that is, Marcos's technocrats and allies. These profits did not reach the people; for example, 1% of the population presently controls 70% of the wealth.¹³ In addition, wage rates have decreased and unemployment has increased.

One recent informative article entitled 'Effects of the IMF on the Filipino People' presents us with some useful statistics:

- Real wages fell although the economy grew in the 1970s. By 1980 real GNP was 63.5% higher than that of 1972, but real wages of skilled workers that same year fell by 36% from 1972 levels. For unskilled workers the drop in real wages was higher, at 47%.
- The distribution of income has become increasingly concentrated. The poor have become poorer and the rich, richer. In 1965, families belonging to the richest 5% earned 28 times more than those in the bottom 30%. By 1980 the top 5% was earning 34 times more than the bottom 30%.
- The labour-utilization rate (the portion of the working age population who are outside the labour force, but who would become active workers if the sociocultural economic milieu were to be changed appropriately) averaged 36.4% for the years 1976–78.¹⁴

In addition, since 1983 the economy has shrunk.¹⁵

Recent government studies assert that nearly 70% of the population live below the poverty line—\$116 a month for a family of six.¹⁶ According to Political Affairs Minister Aquilino Pimentel, 'this means that some 37.8 million Filipinos

cannot eat three times a day'. In addition, infant mortality is 74 per 1000, with half of these deaths due to malnutrition. Finally, only 40% of the population have access to clean drinking water and 60% of persons die without ever receiving medical attention.¹⁷ This economic wasteland has spread to the Philippines' cultural and intellectual life as well, so that the number of books written has declined dramatically since 1979.¹⁸

Self-reliance

Given the problems and uncertainties of the present export-led model and given the centuries of external political, economic and cultural domination, are there alternative futures for the Philippines that include authentic local human, economic and cultural-spiritual development?

We find some help in the self-reliance model developed by P. R. Sarkar. His model places a primary emphasis on a spiritual-cultural renaissance. This is in marked contrast to economic models which emphasize material development as a goal unto itself. For Sarkar the purpose of economic reforms is to create a society wherein basic rights, such as the right to health, medicine, housing and education, are guaranteed so that individuals can liberate themselves from the problem of survival and develop their intellectual abilities and their spiritual potential. Thus cultural rejuvenation is integral to economic development.

As a strategy to bring about self-reliance, Sarkar suggests the creation of cultural movements to foster awareness of particular areas of linguistic and cultural history. These are suggested in lieu of class-based movements (workers versus capitalists, poor versus rich) because of the ability of the ruling elite to coopt the poor by giving a select few (yet promising all) government jobs and other rewards. Thus the poor rarely identify with each other, that is, they are not self-conscious of their class. However, a people's culture, language and geography are sentiments, points of identification that can unite groups to challenge the existing social relations of the capitalist system.

The strategy, then, is to relegitimize local languages and customs, and to

reconceptualize foreign ways as colonial. Of course, at the same time the self-reliance movement must be careful to evoke greater universal spiritual principles lest the movement disintegrate into provincial secessionism or the violence of present-day Iran.

Another important difference between Sarkar's model and left-oriented models is that for Sarkar there remains the right to private property and income, but property and income have maxi/mini limits based on national wealth. In addition, there would be a large people's cooperative sector (which would certainly at the outset have to be protected), a private entrepreneurial sector (for non-essential goods) and a state sector for large capital-intensive industries. Finally, it is important to note that only the right to accumulate would be limited. The right to knowledge, information, movement etc, presently restricted in governments commonly called communist would be guaranteed in Sarkar's model.

To bring about Sarkar's model, a real revolution, a paradigm change based on spiritual self-reliance, must occur. This would mean breaking from Western and Marxist ideology, and the removal of US bases as well as a struggle against communist guerrillas. It would also mean a repudiation of the national debt to US and other foreign banks. Finally, it would mean developing self-reliance associations, when possible, with other Third World nations (a reconstituted ASEAN, for example).

One movement, KASAMA, a confederation of regional self-reliance associations, is concretely attempting to bring about this vision of self-reliance. The movement is supportive of the Aquino government but is somewhat to the left of her centrist platform. In *KASAMA: Six Demands to Strengthen Democracy in the Philippines*¹⁹ the movement's goals are developed.

The first demand is 100% employment for local people. Local people are defined as those individuals whose social and economic interests are similar to the area that they live in. This presumably means that capital gained from labour or by other means is kept in the area. To achieve total employment KASAMA suggests the creation of labour-intensive cooperative industries, largely in agri-

culture and agro-industries (paper mills, flour mills and other by-products of agriculture). Capital-intensive industries are part of the movement's long-term perspective; employment, however, is the primary goal, the creation of surplus value the secondary goal.

The second demand is the creation of industries in local areas based on the availability of raw materials and based on the local affordability of these products. This counters the development strategy pursued in the Philippines for the last 400 years of developing industries that are export- and profit-based. In addition, KASAMA argues that industries should not import or export local raw materials.

The third demand is that only manufactured goods should be exported and only those manufactured goods that cannot be produced by the local region should be imported. The fourth demand is that the medium of instruction be the local language. The fifth demand is that the local language be the medium of communication in government offices. Finally, the sixth demand is a general demand based on the local areas' needs. Among these are included the removal of the nuclear plant in the Kapampangan-Bataan region, the local control of mines and resources in the Cordillera region, and the return of plantations to local hands in Mindanao.

KASAMA has already initiated producer and consumer cooperatives, as well as musicians' cooperatives that perform in the local language. One band in Iloilo on Panay island, for example, plays in Ilongo and calls itself *Taka-aton*, meaning 'From our place'. Of course it is difficult for local bands to make a living wage as most employment is given to American-sounding bands.²⁰

While such local strategies certainly develop positive alternative models, to attempt to meet all of KASAMA's basic demands would of course immediately dry up overseas capital, alarm regional landowners and Manila capitalists (and others who have profited from 400 years of colonial rule) and create the conditions for the USA to attempt to depose the government. The Church would also be threatened by a spiritual movement which is non-institutional and universalistic in its approach. Finally, given that Sarkar's model does not call for develop-

ing new alliances with the communist nations, the Philippines would indeed be in a precarious situation. Ultimately, only through global, regional and community self-reliance can a model such as Sarkar's be implemented without the dire consequences we have seen in other Third World nations that have attempted to free themselves from the world system. Yet a central project based on populism, localism and critical universalism (lest the movement become destructively race oriented) could ignite the productive resources and capabilities latent in the Philippines.

Other futures

So far we have identified three alternative futures for the Philippines: a continuation of historical colonialism; Aquino's humanistic capitalism; and the self-reliance model. There are others. The New People's Army (NPA) and other groups on the far left are aiming for the establishment of a communist state with a strong central government and an association with the Non-aligned Movement, or perhaps China or the Soviet bloc. Land in this future would become public and industry nationalized. The primary project would be food self-sufficiency; second would be local manufacturing; and third would be a downgrading of the Church and other colonial institutions. The US bases would also be removed.

Left to right

For the communists and the NPA, according to Carolina Malay-Ocampo, the present centrist Aquino government is transitional in nature. 'Social movements tend to polarize the situation. The Aquino government has appeared at a time when the rulers (the capitalist-military alliance) are trying to postpone the real confrontation.'²¹ For her and other NPA members, the rise of Aquino occurred largely because the ruling élite saw its control slipping, saw that Marcos could no longer maintain the Philippines' position in the world economy. The real confrontation is still to come; when, however, remains uncertain.

For this confrontation to occur, the middle class would have increasingly to perceive the government as illegitimate

and the guarantor of foreign interests. A significant global depression in the world economy and a politically weakened, economically contracting USA could create the conditions for an NPA victory.

These conditions would at the same time create the conditions for the failure of the Aquino government. This failure would most likely lead to a series of right-wing military coups attempting to return to the vision of Marcos—limited basic human rights, a disciplined workforce and further integration into the US-run world economy as a supplier of raw materials, manufactured goods, tourism and army bases. Right-wing army rule, however, would certainly in the long run lead to organized movements by farmers, students, skilled workers, intellectuals and the Church. Most likely, this revolution would not be peaceful.

Up and away

Finally, there is the vision of various futurists who see the world, especially the First World, entering a post-industrial era where the problem of scarcity will have been solved through technological breakthroughs in robotics, genetic engineering, computers and telecommunications.²² These breakthroughs will pave the way for unprecedented economic growth such that leisure will be the key problem in the future. We will have factories in space, food surpluses will abound, and the earth will be rationally managed by various transnational agencies—that will make the nation-state functionally obsolete. The Philippines, however, will in this future most likely simply manufacture the components for these new technologies and will not invent or distribute them. Alternatively it may survive on tourism; that is, it may be the place to visit to see the remnants of the industrial world. In addition, it will certainly be the place where scientists test their biotechnological or pharmaceutical inventions.

Although technologies developed in the context of inequity tend to increase the wealth and power of the privileged, it can also be argued, as James Dator has, that in some cases the new electronic technologies can help to break down oppressive, centralized, patho-bureaucratic structures;²³ the globally televised Aquino revolution may be a case in point.

In addition, Dator suggests that poor countries should attempt to 'leapfrog' the industrial era and through the use of telematics (computers, videos, robotics) enter a post-industrial era; for example, they should use telecommunications to locate industries in the villages and provinces, thus arresting urbanization. While this image is indeed inviting, the Philippines, as a poor nation, must still borrow from international banks to obtain the capital to purchase these technologies, and borrowing further increases its dependence. Hence the basic problems remain: how to get ahead of post-industrial societies, invest in technology and education, and create enough national wealth so that at least basic needs are met.

So far only Singapore, it appears, is attempting to make this transition to a post-industrial society. It is already developing biotechnology industries and attempting to become 'literate' in the technologies of the future through simple efforts such as making 'a computer in every home' a planning goal.²⁴ However, it is dependent on the ups and downs of the world economic system, such that it is now experiencing negative growth.

For the Philippines, until self-reliance is achieved the post-industrial era remains afar and inequity, poverty and hunger remain near.

Conclusion

The history of the Philippines is a history of colonialism, of political revolutions which have maintained an inequitable economic structure, and of increasing levels of poverty and malnutrition. For the common Filipino the last 400 years have been a story of misery, anguish and despair. The overthrow of Marcos and his crony capitalism initially promised to bring about a better future for the Philippines. However, as the turmoil in the last few years has shown, the future is not clearly marked. Aquino's humanistic capitalism may find itself going the way of previous revolutions—merely producing simple changes of political power and short-term cultural renewal. If Aquino successfully implements her economic reforms—and if the world economy expands—then her government may last well into the 1990s. However, the possibility of a return to a strong central

government (with real power in the hands of the military) has increased as the promises of the revolution have not been fulfilled. The brief sense of idealism, the euphoria of creating a new society has been slowly replaced by the much deeper pessimism, by the much wider sense of powerlessness that has traditionally been part of the colonial legacy. 'We are small people,' it is still said.

Politically, Aquino has been unable to or has refused to play the strong male leader role. Rather she continues to play the role of the nurturing mother. Thus, she experiments with elections and hopes that a polity will emerge that is representative of all classes—labour, intellectuals, capitalists and the military. However, rivalries between these classes have increased in the past year. The military, in particular, continues to force Aquino towards a much more right-wing position. The political language remains communist versus capitalist. The self-reliance model in this discourse is lumped with the communist model and efforts to meet the basic needs of the poor, implement land reforms and pursue other objectives of social justice remain elusive.

Although intellectuals and many of the poor and powerless might prefer the self-reliance model, the leftist model or even the post-industrial model, the allure of the lottery of capitalism, of the possibility that perhaps one's brother or sister can make it in Manila or that somehow the Philippines can join the Developed Nations Club remains. Realizing Aquino's vision of these alternative futures will not be easy; attempts towards them will invite enormous opposition. Yet given the malnutrition, unemployment, spiritual degeneration, and horror of the present, a new future appears to be the only hope.

Unfortunately, recent events in the Philippines have increased the likelihood of an increased concentration of power, wealth and social control. Marcos and his vision of the future may find a home in Manila yet.

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2. Anne Nelson, 'In the Grotto of the Pink

- Sisters', *Mother Jones*, January 1988, p. 20.
3. See P. R. Sarkar, *PROUT in a Nutshell, V1-12* (Calcutta, Ananda Press, 1987); Tim Anderson, *The Liberation of Class* (Sydney, Australia, Proutist Universal Publications, 1984); and Ravi Batra, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism* (London, Macmillan, 1978). Sarkar presents a cyclical/dialectical view of social space/time, wherein power is exercised in historical stages by warriors (military power), intellectuals (priests, cultural power) and capitalists (economic power) on the other classes and on the proletariat/peasants. The only class that does not exercise power is the proletariat. They, however, play a pivotal role in the revolutionary or as the case may be evolutionary transition from the era of capitalists to the era of warriors—that is, to a centralized polity.
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 14. Ma. Theresa Diokno, 'Effects of IMF on the Filipino people', *IFDA Dossier*, November/December 1984, pages 63–68.
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