# ‘Mahiya naman kayo!’

https://opinion.inquirer.net/185054/mahiya-naman-kayo

As State of the Nation Addresses (Sona) went, President Marcos’ fourth stab at it was a marked departure from the usual in one respect: tone.

While the inflated rhetoric, bombastic promises, and flood of metrics typically expected from this once-a-year political ritual were still there, what stuck out was something else—Mr. Marcos’ seemingly more candid and modest demeanor.

He had no qualms, for instance, acknowledging at the onset the sour, dissatisfied mood of the populace halfway through his term, as seen in the lackluster performance of his senatorial roster in the recent midterm polls. His administration needed to do better and move faster, he admitted.

While data may show that the economy is humming, business confidence and jobs are up, and inflation is down, all that is “palamuti lamang” (mere decoration) and means nothing when most Filipinos remain poor and burdened, he added.

What to do then? The rest of the President’s speech, spoken mostly in Filipino, then devolved into the usual laundry list of government projects ticked off in succession to cover as many urgent social concerns as possible: boost jobs and industrialization; continue to sell P20/kg rice, which Mr. Marcos hailed as a success (despite experts warning that it’s an unsustainable populist move impoverishing local farmers); invest in renewable resources to bring down power rates and improve water access; build more classrooms, give teachers gadgets and training, provide more educational scholarships; enhance public health; support specific sectors such as athletes, PWDs, students; and so on.

## ‘For the boys’

In last year’s Sona, the President earned a standing ovation when he announced a definitive ban on Philippine offshore gaming operators. This time, similar calls for prohibiting online gambling, or at least tightening regulations given the social ills the industry has likewise spawned, was met with silence—not a word about it getting into the one-hour and 11-minute Sona speech.

What got the President’s audience up on their feet was when, near the end of his speech, Mr. Marcos said he had inspected the devastation caused by the recent extreme weather events, and had seen for himself how many flood-control projects were substandard, easily damaged, and some even nonexistent (“guni-guni lang”).

Let’s not kid ourselves, he added. Everyone knows how public-works projects are milked by the corrupt through “kickback, initiative, errata, SOP, for the boys.” To these crooks in government, shame on you (“Mahiya naman kayo!”), the President thundered. He warned public officials and contractors behind such shoddy projects that their time of reckoning is near. When? “Within the coming months,” the President promised, effectively holding himself to a definite timeline.

## Performance review

To prevent the theft of public funds, he ordered the Department of Public Works and Highways to submit to him a list of all flood-control projects in every region in the last three years. “Second, the Regional Project Monitoring Committee shall examine that list of projects and give a report on those that have been failures, those that were not finished, and those that are alleged to be ghost projects.”

“And third, we will publish this list.”

In addition, “there will be an audit and performance review regarding these projects to check and make sure and to know how your money was spent.” Finally, the clincher: “In the next months, we will file cases against those found culpable by the investigation, including contractors across the country.”

That is a very specific to-do list. Can this administration deliver? Can it actually send plunderers to jail for the billions robbed from crucial public works that spell life and death for ordinary Filipinos?

Half of P2 trillion (yes, P1 trillion!) spent on flood-control projects since 2011 may have been lost to corruption, Sen. Panfilo Lacson said, as reported in this paper’s banner story on the day of the Sona (see “P1T for flood control likely lost due to graft–Ping,” News, 7/28/25). On top of that, the Philippines was estimated to have lost P700 billion to corruption in 2019.

## Thievery in government

Imagine how that amount has grown in the current era given the gargantuan increase in the national budget along with pork insertions—ironically courtesy of the very same lawmakers who cheered the President’s broadside against thievery in government.

Among all the items in the 2025 Sona, this assurance—that Mr. Marcos will spend his remaining years in office waging war against corruption—will likely be the most-watched by the public, the President having set himself up for such expectations.

In the next few months, he has to fulfill every one of the deliverables he had presented, then take aim at the secretive, insidious process of the national budget itself.

That will prove whether he was indeed sincere in his vow to reform government into a more honest, transparent beast—or, like every other political pledge, his words were also “palamuti lamang,” hollow and meaningless in the end.