# From ‘roads to riches’ | Inquirer Opinion

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It would have made for a legitimate rags to riches story: Sarah Discaya, daughter of a hotel chambermaid and waiter in London, starts out as a receptionist, rises up the corporate ladder, and now heads several thriving businesses in the country.

Except for one very telling line in that infamous interview in September last year when broadcast journalist Julius Babao asked Discaya what “gateway” allowed them entry into such rarefied world. She replied: “Nung nag-DPWH kami (When we got contracts with the Department of Public Works and Highways).” Forthwith, she showed the awestruck host some 40 luxury vehicles just for their “personal use.”

A January 2025 interview with talk show host Korina Sanchez similarly featured the Discayas’ unbounded riches, as she gave a tour of their multilevel lavish home. A side focus on Discaya spouse Pacifico’s massive crystal collection, with one piece priced at P7 million, added to the shine that the two interviews apparently sought to bestow on the couple as part of their “inspirational” narrative, a fawning approach publicly called out by Pasig Mayor Vico Sotto.

Two of Discaya’s construction companies are among the 15 contractors slammed by President Marcos for cornering 20 percent of the P545 billion flood control budget since 2022. Despite such largesse, most of the contractors are behind several disastrous flood projects that sank cities and municipalities in last month’s string of typhoons.

## Substandard structures

Number 2 and 3 on the monopoly list are Alpha & Omega Gen. Contractor & Development Corp. and St. Timothy Construction Corp. which are linked to the Discayas. In all, they have nine construction firms that bagged 403 flood control contracts between 2022 and 2025 worth almost P30 billion, Sotto said.

By their own admission, it’s easy to see where the Discayas got their wealth. Government agencies must now seek to uncover possible collusion between the couple and the DPWH, and even some lawmakers who acted as project proponents.

As noted by Sen. Ping Lacson, only about 40 percent of the approved funding for public works go into actual implementation, as the rest is divided among the contractor, DPWH officials, and proponent. As a result, contractors scrimp on materials used, hence the inevitable collapse of substandard structures when they are needed most.

The Discayas said they entered into DPWH contracts in 2016. Barely 10 years later, the family’s wealth could put to shame the P10 billion pork barrel funds that convicted plunderer Janet Napoles was said to have pocketed along with corrupt lawmakers.

## Economic sabotage

Belatedly, the Bureau of Customs said it would investigate the couple’s reported ownership of 40 luxury vehicles. The Bureau of Internal Revenue meanwhile said it will look into the tax liability of the contractors on the list.

While the Discayas, being private parties, can’t be compelled to file their statement of assets, liabilities and net worth nor be subjected to a lifestyle check, they can be charged with graft, economic sabotage, fraud, as well as falsification of documents for misrepresenting project status. As co-conspirators of any government official principally accused of plunder, the couple may also be charged of this nonbailable offense. Additionally, they should be blacklisted from future government contracts.

Going after the Discayas hammer and tongs should send a clear message about exacting accountability for the wanton misuse of public funds. The Discayas, too, must be put to task for flaunting their questionable wealth in the face of so much grief and suffering because of failed flood control projects. At least 24 died of leptospirosis this month in Quezon City alone, while thousands have lost lives, homes, crops, and livelihood in the rampaging waters and landslides.

## A matter of ‘diskarte’

Discaya’s justification for such wealth—”Feeling nga naming mag-asawa na ginawa kaming instrument ni Lord” to help others—also reeks of hypocrisy. Isn’t this a case of unscrupulous greed—enabled by unfettered access to taxpayer money—becoming the means to filch funds meant for the poor, and not the other way around?

As for the Discaya story being meant “to inspire others to work hard and persevere to attain similar success,” can the two veteran journalists say those very words to the farmers, fishers, and other struggling Filipinos whose generations of backbreaking honest toil still mean living in survival mode?

Well, it’s all a matter of diskarte, strategy or resourcefulness, the interviewers pronounced, of which the Discayas have a surfeit of. Under intense scrutiny, diskarte here translates to cunning, connections, and the ability to go around the rules to gain undeserved advantage.

Hopefully, the government would move fast enough to preempt whatever diskarte the Discayas might think of to extricate themselves from the predicament created by their ostentatious display of wealth.