# Heinous, barbaric crimes

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Some crimes are so heinous, so extraordinarily vile that they become watershed moments in the national narrative—seared into the public’s consciousness as an assault on the people’s fundamental sense of security and order, and immediately a defining challenge for the government that must deal with the ramifications of the sordid deed.

Such was the case with the 1993 Sarmenta-Gomez kidnap-murders during the Joseph Estrada presidency, which saw the country shaken to its core when it learned that a town mayor, Antonio Sanchez of Calauan, Laguna, had his henchmen snatch a young student, Aileen Sarmenta, for his sport. Sarmenta was raped first by Sanchez and then by his gang, then killed. Allan Gomez, Sarmenta’s friend who was kidnapped along with her, was beaten to death. As Pasig Judge Harriet Demetriou declared in her 1995 decision convicting Sanchez and his cohorts (some of them policemen), it was a “plot seemingly hatched in hell.”

## Official impunity

Under Rodrigo Duterte’s administration, thousands of drug suspects were felled either by policemen, or by vigilantes who targeted their prey even in broad daylight.

But against this panorama of blood and violence, one crime still managed to stand out for being so horrific that it became emblematic of the official impunity ravaging the country: the kidnap-murder of Korean businessman Jee Ick-jo.

Under the guise of an anti-drug raid, cops abducted Jee and his house helper from Jee’s home in Angeles City, then demanded a ransom of P8 million. Jee’s wife paid P5 million, the helper was released a day after the abduction, but Jee was nowhere to be found. That was because, on the very day he was kidnapped, Jee was strangled to death inside his black van—which had been brought to Camp Crame, the national police headquarters, and parked just several meters away from the office of the Philippine National Police chief. Jee’s body was brought to a funeral parlor where his remains were cremated, and the ashes flushed down the toilet. The cops then divvied up his personal belongings, including jewelry and a golf set. The PNP chief at that time? Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, now the senator running for reelection.

To this grisly list of historic crimes must now be added the recent kidnap-slay of business tycoon Anson Que and his driver—already the third such kidnapping case to have targeted the Chinese community in a mere five weeks, according to civic leader Teresita Ang-See.

## Pillar of philanthropy

By now the gruesome details of the crime are well-known: Even after Que’s family had reportedly paid P160 million in ransom, Que and his driver still ended up dead, their bodies, bearing signs of strangulation, eventually found in Rodriguez, Rizal. Before them, a 14-year-old Chinese student had been abducted, and was released with one of his fingers mutilated. The other kidnap victim was a food kiosk owner from Binondo, Manila.

“With outrage and grief, we deplore in the strongest possible terms the heinous, barbaric kidnapping and brutal murders of Mr. Anson Que—a businessman, a pillar of philanthropy—and his driver, whose life was equally precious, equally sacred,” said the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Inc., and Philippine Exporters Confederation said in a joint statement.

It’s a sentiment the Marcos administration better take heed of. In February, the Palace had crowed that the crime rate under it was lower compared to figures under its predecessor, and that the crime problem in the country was being “sensationalized.”

## Lasting, definitive taint

Just weeks later, the Que kidnap-murder and others like it should jolt the government from its self-satisfied complacency. Notorious crimes such as brazen kidnappings are back—or at least that is what the public perceives from the spate of disturbing incidents cropping up—and if authorities fail to address the problem with adequate dispatch, thoroughness, and transparency, the Marcos administration may end up not just with a basic law-and-order issue, but one that leaves it vulnerable to a potent political attack from the Duterte camp: that it is essentially weak on crime, and cannot be relied upon to protect its citizens.

The task for authorities in the Que case is immediate: Find the perpetrators of the crime, charge them in court, and bring justice to Que’s family. And while the investigation is ongoing, the police must be told off from airing speculations in public that only tend to inflict more aggravation on the victim’s family—such as his alleged ties to shadowy Philippine offshore gaming operators or Pogos, which Que’s kin and business associates have strenuously denied.

The immediate and just resolution of the Que case, and others like it, should provide an anxious public the reassurance that the government is on top of the situation. Failing that duty will be a lasting, definitive taint on the Marcos administration’s record.