

## CHAPTER V

### BUAYAN TO GENERAL SANTOS: MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL CHANGE

This chapter deals with the post-war changes of the settlement area of Koronadal Valley found in the Municipal District of Buayan until it became a city two decades after the end of World War II. Discussed in the early part is the initial phase of recovery made difficult by NLSA's failure to provide leadership during these difficult times and a calamity of unbelievable proportion which befell Cotabato province lasting for almost a decade.

Amidst the challenges of the post-war period, Buayan, propelled by its inherent geographic advantage and the established pattern of peaceful interaction between the Christian settlers and the original inhabitants, was able to recover sufficiently to start the process of qualitative growth and development. Nonetheless, the continuous pouring in of Christian settlers into the area led to the transformation of the hitherto extension of the Magindanao world into a predominantly Christian territory. While generally peaceful, any change is usually accompanied by tension. But as of the sixties, land conflicts, bombings, kidnappings, and the like that characterize 21<sup>st</sup> century reality were not part as yet of the Mindanao horizon. In the South Cotabato world, the period after the war until 1967 was characterized by optimism expressed by the term "boom-town-in-the-making." Such upbeat tempo of the former Buayan was the mode of the day despite the tremendous difficulties faced by the inhabitants of the area immediately after the war.

#### **A. Buayan : Intrigues, "Daga, Balang,at iba pa", 1946 - 1954**

The post liberation period found Koronadal Valley in shambles just like the rest of the country. The rebuilding of homes and lives was then the primary concern as shown by the experiences of Reverend Domingo, Vic Diaz and Mr. Dulay.

Reverend Domingo found himself in Davao working in an abaca plantation farm trying to earn money for fare in order to get his family in Luzon and bring them to his farm lot in Koronadal. "If she (the wife) didn't go with me, then, I'll just have to look for somebody else," Reverend Domingo laughed while looking at his wife. However, after returning to his farmlot in Barrio Caloocan in Marbel district, the occurrence of a succession of drought, rats and locusts caused him to lose face with his wife. "*Parang mas mahirap ang buhay dito noon kaysa sa Luzon*" ("life appeared more difficult here than in Luzon during that period"), the wife offered her thinking of the situation. Moreover, despite difficulties they managed to survive. Later, Federico had the chance to continue his studies to become a religious minister. "*Ang asawa ko ang nagpa-aral sa akin. Siya ang nagpatakbo sa farm hanggang maging ganap na ministro ako.*" ("It was my wife who sent me to school by taking care of the farm until I became a full-pledged religious minister"). Both are in agreement, however, that without the farmlot, he would not had the chance to take further studies, a dream of a lifetime.

The young man Vic Diaz, who was then a student, decided that somebody had to sacrifice if the family had to survive the calamities of rats and the locusts. As the eldest child, he felt it was his responsibility to sacrifice for

the sake of the younger ones. Despite the scholarship offered by the Oblates in Notre Dame of Cotabato, he felt he had to work so the younger brothers and sisters could continue with their studies. So, he stopped schooling and worked in a private company in Davao. *"It was destiny. There, I met my wife who was a teacher in Davao. Later, when my younger brother was able to enter the U.S. Navy and dollar money came, I felt it was time for me to marry. Somebody had to sacrifice for the family. I am proud to say that I have done my share for the family"*.

Mr. Dulay continued to work with the NLSA. The abolition of the NLSA did not pose a problem to people of skills, especially with the establishment of multinational corporations in Buayan starting the sixties. Also helpful was the condonation of debts owed by the settlers to the government by President Magsaysay in 1954 after the succession of drought, locusts and rats hit Cotabato.

What was apparent from the interviews conducted was the clarity of accounts of the informants' experiences from the time of arrival to Koronadal Valley until the war period. After the war, however, the accounts of community events appear hazy although informants were very clear on their personal circumstances. This led to the assumption that the informants were then so preoccupied with rebuilding lives after the war that the pre-war keen participation in the building of a community was reduced to the minimum and left to the government. It can be said with no fear of contradiction, therefore, that the highest point of community esprit de corps was before the war years. It was the time when everyone knew everybody. Decision-making was made in public consultation participated in by everybody. A conscious effort of building a community was the prevailing norm then. The post-war condition and the increase of population changed all these.

The people resumed their normal activities after liberation. Within the settlement area, the settlers under the NLSA tried to resume their pre-war activities. But a 1946 Malacañang report found Koronadal Valley in chaos:

*"The whole NLSA organization may be likened to a captainless ship adrift for the last eleven months in the sea of discord, disorganization and personal ambition. The crew is in mutiny, while the officers are engaged in a feud among themselves. Nobody is in command and nobody could be allowed to take command, for there is mutual suspicion . . .*

*There is evident lack of planning on the rehabilitation of the KAVP from the dismal ruins of war, clearly visible from the once blooming fields of Koronadal. The employees and settlers have degenerated into self-seeking maggots waiting for the lumps of government aid. A big number of settlers have abandoned their farm lots expecting that the government should first supply all their wants" (Testa 1946: 4)*

The 1946 report attributed the chaotic condition of the immediate post-war period to the "untimely death of General Paulino Santos." Lt. Jesus Larrabaster, who took command of the NLSA after the suicide of the late Albert

Morrow, was not able to fill the void in leadership left by General Santos and Albert Morrow. Lt. Larrabaster had the unenviable task of making the Koronadal Project work during the Japanese occupation. But lack of funds was a major drawback.

The withdrawal of government assistance to the settlers in the form of a weekly food ration listed as loan was not longer possible. Not everyone was able to harvest his or her fields when the Japanese came. The NLSA officials and employees who returned to work were better off during the occupation because of the salaries they received, albeit in a reduced amount, and the eight hectares of land of the Administration Farm loaned to them. Thus, the settlers felt oppressed when obligated to turn over a percentage of their produce to the NLSA in accordance with the settlement contract but with the NLSA unable to provide the usual assistance in the form of food ration. Attorney Testa's report told of the altercation between the supervising overseer and a settler who refused to give a percentage of the salt the latter was selling. The settler reportedly told the overseer: "When we needed your help you did not help us, and now that we have the salt you want to get it from us (Testa, 1946:4)."

Unlike General Santos whose "semi-militaristic" ways was neutralized by his perceived concern for the interest of the settlers giving him the "father" image, the recorded settlers' complaints against some officials of the NLSA of abuse of authority filed by the United Settlers Movement against eight officials of the NLSA indicated that nobody was able to fill the void caused by General Paulino Santos' absence from the settlement. Consider the following accusations: (Testa 1946: 22)

1. Accusation of irregularities such as the grabbing of tracts of land and operation of private businesses inside the settlement;
2. The use of dummies in acquiring farm lots;
3. Irregularities in the procurement of supplies and materials, and even farm animals;
4. Farm produce delivered by the settlers to the Farm Products Exchange during the Japanese time were not credited to them due to erroneous preparation and/or tampering of records;
5. Conflicts of claims on farm lots; and
6. The subdivision of the Administration Farms and their distribution among the employees.

Clearly, some officials were perceived to have taken advantage of the tremendous power given the NLSA as a corporation and the consequent potential for power over the settlers. This led to a condition of Koronadal Valley likened to a "captainless ship" after the war.

Besides the lack of psychological acceptance of new leaders due to perception of irregularities and abuse of authority, another factor contributing to the intrigue and dissension of the immediate post-war period was the politization of Koronadal Valley. The two camps involved in the charges and counter-charges against each other happen to belong to two opposing camps representing the two presidential candidates for the 1945 election - the Osmeña and Roxas camps.

From the long list of complaints one can deduce that the once efficiently run NLSA Koronadal project tightly controlled and supervised by the general

manager had degenerated into an inefficient corporation tinged with accusations of corruption and self-gain. Attorney Testa vividly depicted this state of condition in his report: (Testa 1946: 5-8)

*“The investigation disclosed that the officials and employees of the National Land Administration (NLSA) are divided in cliques, prompted by petty jealousies, intrigue, individual ambition, and, in certain instances, by envy. The settlers are similarly divided among the contending cliques. The establishment of cantonments is all that is lacking to complete the scene of pitched battle. The stage was well set for a tragedy, first by the untimely death of the former Manager, General Paulino Santos, the man who held them under control and together; and, second, by the uncertainties surrounding the plump and desirable key positions, still vacant and thus tempting, - that, no wonder, one group should desire to outwit the other, not to say, that there are pre-existing rivalries and axes to grind.”*

The investigation body came up with the following recommendations concerning the case in question: (1) the reconstitution of the Board of Directors; (2) that permanent appointments be made to all key positions; (3) that funds be released for the acquisition of reconstruction materials, farm implements, working animals, and seeds, and for the control and eradication of locusts; (4) that the conflicts of claims over farm-lots and the status of probationary settlers be settled; and (5) the laying down of policies which will place the settlers on their own within the shortest possible time.

The NLSA Koronadal-Allah Valley Project continued to be a “captainless ship” without direction and not able to command the ship. There were changes of men and personnel. But the government was not ready to give up on the program. However, things did not improve. It continued in the same directionless way. Four years later, Speaker Perez and other congressmen in a surprise visit reported a sorrier state of affairs:

*“After the town of Lagao, the Koronadal settlement stretched outward to the range of mountains dividing Koronadal from Allah. Speaker Perez often stopped the wagon to talk to settlers, inquire about their lives, their farming, their needs.*

*The speaker found the settler’s homes in a mundane condition. No flower plants in the front yard, no vegetable garden in the back, no fruit trees, no papayas, no bamboo trellises for climbing legumes.*

*The farmsteads were in a sorrier state. The cogon started viciously just a few meters from the settler’s house, smothering the little corn patch or the one-tenth hectare rice paddy.*

*Even the NLSA hospital was closed when the party unexpectedly dropped in. The NLSA repair shop would have delighted a Chinese scrap-iron buyer: it was filled with junk tractors and trucks.*

The speaker found the famous dam built by the late Manager Paulino Santos. In 1940 it was irrigating 1,500 hectares of Koronadal land; when the speaker saw it last week, it was shallow, choked by entangling vines and weeds . . ." (*Evening News Saturday Magazine*, Vol. 5, No.23, June 10, 1950: 6-7)

Presumably, the incessant problem on inefficiency, corruption, and wastage of government money led to the abolition of the NLSA and its incorporation into its successor agency, the Land Settlement Administration (LASEDECO) in 1950. The NLSA left a liability of nearly 2 million pesos (Lichauco 1956: 191). Under the NLSA, three major resettlement areas were opened in the country: Mallig Plains in Isabela, and two in Cotabato, namely Koronadal Valley made up of Lagao, Tupi, Marbel and Polomolok and Allah consisting of Banga, Norala and Surallah. Its successor agency, the LASEDECO was able to open Tacurong, Isulan, Bagumbayan, part of Buluan, Sultan sa Barongis and Ampatuan, all in Cotabato. The LASEDECO was later taken over by the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) in 1954 which was able to administer a total of 23 resettlement areas: nine in Mindanao; one in Palawan; five in the Visayas; one in Mindoro; seven in mainland Luzon (Rodil 1994: 39).

There was also the special program of the government to counter the upsurge of the Huk rebellion, a brainchild of then Secretary of National Defense Ramon Magsaysay - the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) which established settlement areas in Isabela, Quezon, Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato and Maguindanao.

The government resettlement programs caused an enthusiastic response from the Filipinos particularly those coming from the Visayas region. Moreover, settlers who came after the war found out that there was no welcoming group waiting for them at the seashores; no bunkhouses where they could temporarily stay while awaiting settlement; no ready farm lots available for distribution; and no government support for food and materials needed for house construction and other needs. The post-war settlers found that they had to fend for themselves. Buayan was still "carrying a pioneer-like atmosphere into most facets of its physical and cultural landscapes" until the 60s but it "can no longer be viewed as a limitless Eldorado."

As if intrigues and corruption were not enough, Cotabato experienced a calamity of unbelievable proportion - drought, rats, and locusts - coming one after the other between the periods 1946 - 1954 which made life difficult for the people of the province trying to rehabilitate themselves from the ruins of the war. One account portrayed Cotabato in a state of calamity:

*"Ito naman ang masaclap dahil dumating ang grupo ng ilaga na katakotakot na ang palayan na kahit isang hectaria na nakatayo ang palay dumating ang kinabukasan ay ubos na walang matira kahit isa man lang punong maiwan. Ang mga ilaga ay walang patawad kahit mga talahib, damo, saging. Governor Udtog hiniling sa mga Philippine Marine Infantry upang tumolong sila ng rat campaign. At umabot kami sa taon 1953 ito taong ito ay pinakamaraming ilaga na halos ang mga balong na ginawa namin sa isang gabi doon kami naghahampas ng dahil ang mga pag-kain ay wala na kaya't sa loob ng taong ito nahirapan kami. May dumating na suportang bigas*

*ngunit halos himdi makain ng baboy ngunit pinagtiisan namin. Sa 1954 dumating din ang mga balang (locust) na halos hindi mo makita and araw sa kapal kaya't ang mga escuela sila rin ang sumaklolo ngunit wala kaming magawa kaya ang akala namin ay mamatay kaming lahat. . . Dahil hindi namin makaya ang mga balang kaya't aeroplano ang ginagamit pangispray . . ."* (Reverend Federico Domingo 1947)

(The misery came in the form of an army of rats which can destroy one hectare of palay in just one night. the rats did not spare anything, even the cogon grass, weeds, bananas. Governor Udtog asked the Philippine Marine Infantry for help in the rat campaign. This was the situation until 1953. We made big holes in the ground where rats were thrown and killed. The time came when we have no more food to eat. The government sent rice but it was not even fit to be eaten by pigs. In 1954, the locusts came in a number so great that one could not see the sky when they fly in the air. Everybody helped, including school children but to no avail . . . Eventually, planes were used to spray the locusts with pesticides).

The rats and locusts were the major reasons for the migration of a lot of Koronadal - Allah valleys settlers, particularly from Banga and Norala, to Bukidnon (Vic Diaz, in an interview, 1996). Some informants blamed the wide cultivation in Upper Valley (Surallah, Banga, and Norala) by the National Development Corporation for the destruction of the ecosystem. Accordingly, the disappearance of the forests due to clearings made by individual settlers and the National Development Corporation led to the disappearance of wild animals (wild pigs, deer, snake, etc.) which feasted on the rats - a destruction of its natural check and balance system led to the proliferation of locusts and rats in Cotabato immediately after the war.

The problem to farm produce brought by rats and locusts caused the inhabitants to tackle the problem as a community once more. The problem was too great and the survival of the community was at stake that differences were temporarily set aside and various sectors of the populace joined the local officials in the rat and locust campaign. The Army, particularly the Task Force Star, with the marine units also extended their hand in the campaign. The newly opened Philippine National Bank Dadiangas Branch helped alleviate the situation by giving out loans to farmers (Ramirez 1993: 224).

Amidst the period of rehabilitation and reconstruction, the decade after the war also saw the inevitable transformation of the Municipal District of Buayan from a previous extension of the Magindanao world into a newcomers' territory.

### ***B. From Magindanao Domales to a Christian Territory***

One NLSA settler's son who resided in General Santos City during the settlement years for 12 years and 43 years in Cotabato City as a teacher and later as a journalist, Patricio P. Diaz, gave us a glimpse of the vaunted pre-war pattern of Christian - Muslim accommodation and cooperation with the Muslims

as big Brother and migrant settlers as the little brothers when he described the great Datu Salipada K. Pendatun:

*“With pride and fondness, the late Salipada K. Pendatun would talk about Muslim - Christian Brotherhood as a legacy which Muslim leaders of old, including himself, had nurtured in the Empire Province of Cotabato. The Brotherhood, with the Muslims as the Big Brothers, started with the coming of the first Christian settlers in 1913 . . . .*

*He lived the Brotherhood he proudly and fondly talked about:*

- Married to a Christian until death.*
- Helped Christians grow in political leadership.*
- Had close association with Christian Missionaries . . . . ” (Diaz 1995: iii)*

Moreover, despite the earlier accommodation with the indigenous inhabitants, the Christian ethos brought by the settlers into the valley moved them to cut the umbilical cord that tied the southern part of Cotabato to the Magindanao world redefining the place into a Christian territory. Twin moves made this possible.

Symbolic of the transformation of the Sugod Buayan’s *domales* into a new community with a predominantly Christian ethos was the changing of the name Buayan to General Santos. Ironically, it was the Magindanao congressman of the Empire Province of Cotabato, Congressman Luminog Mangelen, who authored Act No. 1107, an act which changed the name Buayan Municipality into the “Municipality of General Santos” in June 1954. At almost the same time, the Ilonggos of Marbel campaigned for the separation of the southern part from the province of Cotabato. This materialized on June 18, 1966 with Republic Act No. 6393 creating the Province of South Cotabato (Ramirez 1993: 224).

The changed power relationship hit hard the Muslim leaders, Pendatun included. In the election of 1967, lawyer Melquiades Sucaldito, his Ilonggo kumpare, opposed Congressman Salipada K. Pendatun. Salipada K. Pendatun won but was beaten 2 to 1 in the south, the present South Cotabato and Sarangani, a predominantly Christian section of the Empire Province (Diaz 1995: iii).

The transformation of the previous extension of the Magindanao world into a Christian territory was facilitated by the settlers’ participation in the political life of the Municipal District of Buayan. This is significant because while before, the settlers’ world was confined within the exclusive world of the settlement district, the post war development brought forth the real mixing of different ethnic groups. This expanded interest on the side of the settlers opened additional avenues for land acquisition and political power.

There was interest in the acquisition of land outside the settlement by entrepreneurial settlers and NLSA employees. Areas outside Lagao, the settlement district, became the focus of this emerging interest. One pioneer teacher of Dadiangas West Central Elementary School reported their survey of

several mountains on foot, which her companions assured, could be theirs by simply applying for a land patent (Panadero, in an interview, 1996).

An illustration of pre-occupation on land acquisition-mania pervading Buayan district, in particular, and Mindanao, in general, during the immediate post-war period is the following Resolution No. 71 passed by the Municipal Council of General Santos on June 20, 1955.

Resolution No. 71, Series of 1955  
OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR  
MEETING OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF  
GENERAL SANTOS MUNICIPALITY WHICH WAS  
HELD IN THE SESSION HALL, ON MONDAY, JUNE  
20, 1955.

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Present:

Irineo L Santiago	Mayor
Lucio Velayo	Councilor
Felicisima B. Salomon	Councilor
Donato Quinto	Councilor
Jose B. Abaoag	Councilor
Gil Rivas	Councilor
Abelardo Gonzales	Councilor

Absent:

Agustin D. Narciso	
Vice Mayor	
Wenceslao L. Desvarro	Councilor
Mamerto G. Natividad	Councilor

RESOLUTION NO. 71

Whereas, in the beginning way back, sometimes in 1925, when the Olarte Hermanos of Makar, Municipal District of Buayan, Cotabato inspired by the noble purpose to have a town in Barrio Makar, at the beautiful and quiet spot bordering the Sarangani Bay sliced a certain portion from their Hacienda de Makar a parcel of land suitable for a town site, containing an area of about 120 hectares more or less to be proclaimed as the Makar Town Site, whereupon on December 28, 1928 by virtue of the recommendation of the Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources, conceived from that noble idea and objective, Governor General Henry L. Stimson, then in his capacity as Governor General of the Philippines issued an Executive Proclamation No. 204 dated December 18, 1928, setting aside a certain parcel of land of the public domain, for the purpose of



laying out and delineating the Makar Town Site; and in that proclamation it was and still is stated;

“xx situated in the Barrio of Makar, municipal district of Buayan, province of Cotabato, Island of Mindanao, bounded on the north by public land; on the east by public land; on the south by Ohta Development Co.; property claimed by Wahab (Moro) and Sarangani Bay and on the west by Sarangani Bay.”

and by error in the tie line of said Proclamation No. 204, the same was amended by Proclamation No. 149, dated April 16, 1955. In that proclamation **no claimant was or ever is mentioned to have any claim or interest inside the proclaimed area.**

WHEREAS, the purpose and objective of this proclamation is to subdivide this town site into small lots to accommodate as many people as is possible to acquire by his family from the Government.

WHEREAS, in the process of the survey and relocation of the plan of the subdivision scheme of this Makar Town Site, the Chief Survey Party No. T9-G of Dadiangas, General Santos, Cotabato, in his letter to the Municipal Treasurer, dated June 11, 1955, reported that there are claimants, at present of Lot 1, 2, 3 and 4 Ts-50 of the Makar town Site, thus;

Whose alleged possessions ranges from 5 hectares to 15 hectares which is contrary to the aim and purpose conceived by the said Proclamations Nos. 204 and 149, and frustrate the purpose for which it was proclaimed;

WHEREAS, these claimants imbued by the get-rich-quick idea to enrich themselves and thru false pretenses and combination with someone expert in the manipulation processes unscrupulously and thru secret schemes managed to slice and appropriate among themselves bigger areas of Lot 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Ts-50 of the Makar Town Site from 5 to 15 hectares for each and every one of them to the prejudice of the general public, and

WHEREAS, it is the solemn duty of this body to watch over and to protect the public interest of the people against unscrupulous and unjust combinations and manipulations of the shrewd few.

NOW, THEREFORE, on motion of Councilor Quinto duly seconded by Councilor Gonzales, the Council,

RESOLVED, as it is hereby resolved, to request, as it is hereby respectfully requesting, the Director of Lands, Manila, to investigate these claimants and that whatever title, holding, claim or private surveys or rights that each and every one may have in this proclaimed area should be disapproved, cancelled, revoked and/or declared null and void and of no effect.

RESOLVED FURTHER, that this Makar Town site Subdivision should be sold to the general public in the manner as provided in accordance with the tenor and spirit of said proclamation.

RESOLVED FURTHERMORE, that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the President of the Philippines, for his information and appropriate action.

RESOLVED FINALLY, that copies of this resolution be furnished the District Land Officer, Cotabato, Cotabato and the Chief Survey Party No. 19-G, Dadiangas, General Santos, Cotabato, for their information.

Unanimously carried.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the above-quoted resolution.

A. G. HECHANOVA  
Municipal Secretary

Of the claimants mentioned in Resolution No. 71, one was a 1939 settler who earlier was able to acquire lands in Dadiangas by purchase; another one was an employee of the Bureau of Lands; while all the rest were either post-war Christian migrants or Magindanaos. The growing assertiveness of the Magindanaos in acquiring lands in Dadiangas in competition with the settlers after the war appears to be a confirmation of a 1952 observation that after the war the Muslims "woke up to the reality that they have to perfect their ownership to their lands" (Siat, in Millan 1952: 71-73). In Dadiangas it was an attempt to reassert the reality of the Magindanao *domales*. Unfortunately for the indigenous inhabitants, however, the socio-economic-cultural and political transformation of the area had taken a life of its own.

Demographically, the 1948 census indicated that the entire province of Cotabato had the Muslims and the Lumads still in the majority. However, continuous migration radically changed the demographic configuration of Cotabato as shown by Table 3.

TABLE 3  
POPULATION SHIFTS IN COTABATO: 1918, 1939, 1970 Census

SECTOR	1918	%	1939	%	1970	%
Christians	5,110	2.97	59,909	20.17	1,076,485	67.19
Muslims	102,361	59.52	62,996	54.89	444,521	27.75
Lumads	43,067	25.04	54,265	18.28	107,032	6.68
	171,978		296,935		1,602,117	

Source: Appendix f of B.R. Rodil, the Minoritization of the Indigenous Communities of Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago. Iligan City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, Inc., 1994, p. 99.

Table 3 shows that the unabated migration into the area led to the "politics of number" with the original inhabitants proving no match to the

newcomers to the valley whose number jumped from 20.17% in 1939 to 67.19% in 1970 (Table 1). Besides losing out in population, they also lost out in political power resulting to the creation of minority groups in Mindanao with the newcomers taking over the island, economically, politically, and culturally.

Nineteen forty seven election brought to the fore the competition for political power with the settlers edging out in the process the leaders coming from the native population. The death of Sarip Abedin left a void in leadership among the indigenous inhabitants. The list of government officials of General Santos City since 1940 shows that once having taken hold of political power, the Christian sector refused to lose its hold over it. Not surprisingly, this period also saw the coming of the "rich and the powerful" who came to establish "extensive plantations, pasture leases or cattle ranches, mining concerns, logging operations, and rattan concessions" (Gowing 1979: 47-48).

The incessant arrival of Christian settlers to Dadiangas shores led to the "minoritization" of the Muslims and Lumads in South Cotabato. The majority - minority situation with power relationship as an important variable left the native populace at a disadvantage. The situation for the B'laans was depressing as described by Arcenas :

*"Within this framework, the B'laans readily accepted the outsiders settling in their lands. In the early days, there was much land for the taking. The B'laans were content with their produce of corn, cassava, upland rice, camote, gabi, and root crops. Wild animals abound in the forests. . . .At present, it remains difficult for the B'laans to understand the justice in the trampling of their rights and virtual loss of freedom in their homeland. In general, they feel subordinated in economic and political matters. To a greater degree, the B'laans have been reduced to the lot of the mendicant rural poor and perhaps more prejudiced in relation to the impoverished Christian settlers. This has caused them to lose trust and confidence in the Kristiano."* (Arcenas 1974).

Losing trust and confidence in the *Kristianos* is very clear in the experience of a Catholic priest who got stuck up in an out-of-way road with his B'laan companion nonchalantly informing the priest: "*Ayaw kabalaka, father, dili mawala kanang imong sakyanan kay wala man Kristiyano dinhi.*" (Homily by Fr. Willy Estrasa, Barangay Fatima, General Santos City, 1999). But despite the loss of trust and confidence, the B'laan natives remained friendly. As one informant said: "*Murag wala manto'y kasamok tungod kay daghan pa man gud kaayo ug yuta. Kung gusto nimong makaangkon ug yuta, ang imong himoon mao ang limpyohan lamang kini*" (Rogan, in an interview, 1995). ("There was no problem then because there were plenty of land. All that one had to do was clear it). The researcher, however, is inclined to believe that the Commonwealth government's failure to provide protection to the indigenous inhabitants during the period of migration resulted to this unfortunate situation after the war. The later land conflict in Cotabato could have been avoided if the Commonwealth government made good its verbal assurances to the indigenous peoples with regards to respect for their rights over their land. Moreover, with the exception of the "rich and powerful" from Manila and elsewhere who obtained land in

Mindanao even without setting foot on it, an individual migrant- settler cannot be faulted for finding ways and means legally available to him during that period to obtain a piece of land.

Moreover, Christian settlement also provided educational and other opportunities to inhabitants of the valley. Some members of the indigenous group were able to take advantage of these opportunities.

### ***C. The Changing Pattern of Territorial Configuration***

The original inhabitants lost out to the newcomers because they were unable to stem the tide of the rapid influx of newcomers into the area. In 1936, there were only 3 municipalities of the Empire Province of Cotabato (Cotabato town, Dulawan, and Midsayap). By 1947, 10 additional municipalities were created, namely: Buayan, Buluan, Dinaig, Kabacan, Kiamba, Kidapawan, Koronadal, Nuling, Pagalungan, and Parang. The following year, Lebak became a regular municipality. In 1949, four more were added - Tumbao, Pikit, Mlang, and Glan (Gazo, in Millan 1952:205). By 1952, there were 19 municipalities in the Province of Cotabato. These were: Buayan, Buluan, Cotabato, Dinaig, Dulawan, Glan, Kabacan, Kiamba, Kidapawan, Koronadal, Lebak, Midsayap, Mlang, Nuling, Pagalungan, Parang, Pikit, Tacurong, and Tumbao. The continuous movement of people into the Empire Province of Cotabato made these changes inevitable.

In Koronadal Valley, the Buayan District of Southern Koronadal Valley attained a full pledged municipality status in 1947. Before 1947 it was known as the Municipal District of Buayan, one of the five district divisions of the Empire Province of Cotabato together with Buluan, Glan, Koronadal, and Sebu which were placed under the Fourth District Division under a deputy governor whose official headquarter was established in Tacurong, then a part of the Municipal District of Buluan. Governor Udtog Matalam created the five district divisions under the immediate supervision of a deputy governor in order to deal with lawlessness that proliferated in the province immediately after the war (Government Report, 1956).

What happened to the original four settlement areas after the war?

Marbel, later called the Municipality of Koronadal, became the nucleus of the Province of South Cotabato established on June 18, 1966 under Republic Act No. 6393. It is now Koronadal City. Tupi earlier made a barrio of Koronadal became a municipality in 1953 under Executive Order No. 612. Polomolok a became a regular municipality on August 21, 1957 under Executive Order No. 264 separating it from the municipality of General Santos and Tupi (1980 Census).

Symptomatic of the shift of preeminent position from Lagao to Dadiangas during the immediate post-war period was the transfer of the seat of government from the Muksin-Abedin residence in the old Buayan to Dadiangas. Through an allotment from the national government, a wooden municipal building was built in Dadiangas and inaugurated on April 30, 1950 costing P19,700.00 (Ramirez 1993: 224) Originally, the blueprint for the Koronadal-Allah Valley Settlement Project called for the establishment of all government offices in what is today Balete, Lagao (Dulay, in an interview, 1996). However,

Buayan's rapid transformation from an agricultural settlement into a regular local unit of government necessitated the modification of this particular blueprint for development.

In January 1948, Buayan District became a full-pledged municipality as provided by Republic Act No. 82 with Ireneo Santiago as its first mayor. The new municipality had 60 barrios and sitios covering an area of approximately 1413.6 square kilometers with a population of 37,519 (Millan 1952: 69). Among Buayan's known places then were Dadiangas, Lagao, Makar, Bula, Buayan (old), Klinan, Polomolok, Palkan, and Glan (its former mother unit), Malapatan, Malungon and Alabel. The last four places are now municipalities of Sarangani Province while Polomolok is now part of the Province of South Cotabato.

Following is a very interesting description of Dadiangas of the former Buayan Municipality:

*"the seat of local government and center of the Buayan Townsite Sub-division, as approved by the NUPC, Dadiangas is a second class port, a boom-town-in-the-making, where Chinese capitalists are entrenched with about 98% control of the wholesale trade. Several inter-island vessels call regularly at this port every week. A type C pre-fabricated Weather Bureau Station and one of the six radio stations in the province are found in Dadiangas. A PRISCO branch store was established here two years ago. The Court of First Instance also holds session here at least twice a year. There is also an electric light plant, three cinemas, a couple of drug stores and two active labor and stevedoring unions. A P50,000 branch of a Manila automotive supply company and a branch of the San Miguel Brewery, as well as a branch office of the Compania Maritima are also located here. Its post office can boast of a volume of transaction second only to that of the provincial capital, Cotabato" (Siat in Millan 1952:71-72).*

Lagao, as the first site of the pre-war settlers, remained true as the preserver of the cultural tradition of the settlement days. This was seen in Lagao business remaining securely in the hands of Filipinos. Before the war, Lagao was the producer of peanuts and cotton. In the fifties, it was still an important center of trade, second only to Dadiangas. But significantly, retail trade in this locality is in the hands of Filipinos. The hospital, a Notre Dame High School, two drug stores and an ice plant were located here.

But Dadiangas was different. Described in the early fifties as "a second class port, a boom-town-in-the-making" (Siat, 1952: 71-73), Dadiangas became the haven for later migrant settlers; the indigenous inhabitants lured by the available economic opportunities of the area; and foreign traders who were banned from the settlement areas during the days of General Santos. Peopled by later arrivals, Dadiangas became the focus in the creation of the entrepot-hinterland commercial structure. As an important port of call, its strategic location made it the natural administrative and commercial center of the entire Koronadal - Allah Valleys. Unlike the Middle and Northern Koronadal area, its strategic location provided it its varied economic activities besides agriculture

which included among others cattle raising, coconut production, fishing, and trade.

The old Buayan, the old center of political power, was the site of the domestic airport long before the advent of the city's modern international airport in the nineties. Klinan, Palkan, and Polomolok served as the agricultural areas of the Buayan Municipality. Klinan raised corn, rice, and sugar cane. It is now known as Barangay Mabuhay, one of the 26 barangays of the city. Polomolok was the rice granary of Buayan. Palkan, which has a semi-temperate climate, was ideal for the raising of cabbages and potatoes. Palkan and Polomolok are both municipalities of the Province of South Cotabato today.

Bula of the fifties was a developing fishing village. This fishing village developed a cultural tradition anchored on the celebration of a patron saint of fishermen. Today, it is one of the urban barangays of the city, the home of known residents whose prosperity was linked to the development of the city's fishing industry in the eighties.

The construction of the Makar Wharf started in 1953. Today, Makar is the site of the modern port facilities that served as the exit and entry point of people and goods of the SOCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos) area.

The growth of the community is accompanied by the changing landscape. In the fifties, a new arrival docked either at the landing site of Compañía Maritima found along what is today Acharon Boulevard near General Santos Park. A narrow-densely populated area started to appear along the coastline near the Silway River. Houses were usually made of woods, nipa or cogon and bamboos. Roads were dirt roads with some gravel and sand. "*Lubak-lubak*" (bumpy road full of holes), was how one described the status of the road of the fifties. Since this particular informant used to buy softdrinks and beer by the truckload in Dadiangas for his store in Marbel, he didn't expect then to return to Marbel the same day because the "roads were so bad that one expected a bust tire or a vehicle malfunctioning in the travel. So one had to expect for travel time to take more than a day." It was the time when public buses were so few that the common mode of transportation was an ox-drawn cart. "I used to walk from Tupi to Dadiangas, a distance of thirty six kilometers," said a daughter of an NLSA employee assigned in Tupi.

The latter half of the 50's saw the start of road asphaltting in major throughfares of Dadiangas and the national highways connecting the municipality to the neighboring places. Moreover, the previous national highway of pre-war years, which passed through Klinan 6 and Mabuhay in going to Marbel, was changed following the Alunan Highway from Makar to Marbel. The business sectors which previously converged near the General Santos Park started to move into the major thoroughfare in what is Pioneer Avenue today (Villano, in an interview, 1995).

In June 1954, Buayan Municipality was renamed General Santos by virtue of Act No. 1107. Representative Luminog Mangelen of the Province of Cotabato responded to the desire of the people to hold in posterity its founder's name.

The 60s asphalted General Santos Municipality's poblacion area, Dadiangas. More and bigger commercial buildings sprung up. The establishment of bigger and more aesthetic-looking buildings usually followed a

fire gutting several commercial buildings. The pace and tempo of life in the poblacion area, the current Pioneer Avenue, was livelier than in other parts of the municipality.

The poblacion was, and still is, the center of religious activities with the Christian churches of different denominations located in one block facing the public plaza along Roxas East, later renamed Pendatun Avenue. The Catholic Church of Dadiangas was built at the other side of the public plaza along Roxas West. Two mosques were built in Dadiangas, both along the coasts. The municipal hall was constructed at the heart of the plaza. The old commercial district was the area facing Compañia Maritima. Starting the 50s more commercial establishments sprang up along Pioneer Avenue. The need for better port facilities was realized with the opening of Makar Wharf in 1959. The Silway public market proved too small for the burgeoning population of Dadiangas so a new public market was built in front of Lion's Beach along Acharon Avenue.

The ecological changes and development of the Municipality of General Santos from the forties until it became a city in 1967 could best be seen in the ensuing discussion of the political development from 1945-1967. The administration of Mayor Antonio C. Acharon as the last municipal mayor and its first city mayor, is not included in this chapter but will be discussed in Chapter VI.

#### **D. Political Development**

Three identifiable stages characterized the pre-1967 political leadership: first, the dominance by the indigenous leadership before the war; second, a leadership sharing in Buayan district between General Paulino Santos representing the Christian settlers and Sarip Abedin representing the original inhabitants starting 1939 until 1942; and third, the political dominance by the Christian group after the war.

The pre-war years was characterized by Muslim dominance in political affairs. This dominance had Islam as its "ideological cohesion and a basis for unity" and framework. Cotabato has traditionally been identified with the Sultanates of Maguindanao, Buayan, and Kabuntalan. But in South Cotabato a Sultanate of Koronadal was known to have existed. According to reports, about the middle of the 19th century, two sons of Sultan sa Maguindanao, with a retinue of Muslim followers from the north came to settle in the place called Talik, which is two kilometers north of the present poblacion of Koronadal. They formed a Sultanate of Koronadal and built a fortress but Datu Ali from Salunayan destroyed this about the first decade of the twentieth century. The last ruling Sultan of Koronadal was Sultan Sambuto (Hunt 1987: 136).

The debacle of the Sultan sa Talic in the hands of Datu Ali of the Sultanate of Buayan left his followers in Koronadal Valley without a central authority leaving the Muslim leadership in the hands of the datos. There were three kinds of datos in Moro society: datus-in-fact, datus-in-name, and royal datus. "Datus-in-fact actually presided over a group of followers and/or controlled a given territory. Datus-in-name were as a courtesy called datus because they were born into aristocratic families, while in reality they commanded no following and had no power. Since all aristocratic families were generally thought of as descended from the first Sultans of Sulu and

Maguindanao, in a sense all datu were “royal datu,” except those who attained their status by their own personal skills” (Gowing 1979: 47-48).

The leader of Buayan district in 1939 was Sarip Abedin, introduced in the earlier chapter. To recap, Datu Sarip Zainal Abedin was born in Cotabato town. His father was a foreigner, either Arab or an Egyptian, while his mother was a Magindanao. He later on migrated to Buayan where he eventually married Aminah Muksin, a daughter of Sarip Muksin, a renowned datu who traced his descent with the Datu sa Buayan. Following the categorization made by Gowing, Sarip Abedin was both a datu-in-fact and a royal datu.

The 1939 settlers got to know Sarip Abedin as the native chief or presidente of the Municipal District of Glan which included Buayan. His cooperation facilitated the smooth settlement process in Buayan. Even settlers acknowledged the cooperation and peaceful accommodation accorded them by the natives under the leadership of Sarip Abedin. When Buayan was separated from Glan with its creation as the Municipal District of Buayan in 1940, Governor Jose Cui of Cotabato appointed Abedin first mayor of Buayan. However, on January 20, 1942 before the arrival of the Japanese forces, Abedin was killed presumably due to his decision to support General Santos' move to “play ball” with the Japanese besides other personal reasons. He was buried in his private land at Baluan that still exists today. (Banguiran, in an undergraduate thesis, 1987)

As mentioned earlier, the Lagao settlement area was within the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Buayan but administered separately by the National Land Settlement Administration. Thus, two separate political entities existed in Buayan - one, the Municipal District of Buayan under the leadership of Sarip Abedin whose jurisdiction covered the areas outside the settlement districts, and the other, the settlement districts administered by the NLSA. Early on, a pact of cooperation and accommodation was established. But the NLSA- administered territory, infused by government funds provided under Commonwealth Act No. 441, had distinct advantages over the Municipal District of Buayan: it had the infrastructure for modern living like hospital, irrigation, buildings, modern farming machineries, etc. No doubt this led to the Christian settlers' perception that progress in the area only came with the coming of settlers into the valley (See illustration below of farm machineries in Koronadal, ca. 1940)





**Fig. 10. Farm machineries during the NLSA days**

The Japanese period witnessed the disappearance of the two titans of Buayan. Sarip Abedin was already dead when the Japanese arrived. General Santos won't be able to survive the Japanese period but even before he departed from the valley on orders of the Japanese command, his preoccupation with his other functions under the Second Philippine Republic left the settlement in the hands of other officials. Life went on in Koronadal valley but the lack of the guiding hand of its founder led to a crack in the relationship of the NLSA with the settlers themselves. This represented the lowest point of community spirit.

The pre-1960 period of recovery were under the direction of the elite of leaders coming from the pool of Christian settlers and earlier Christian migrants who alternated in leading after having wrested control of Buayan from the traditional leaders. Each leader contributed its own share to the development of the area. A brief profile of the post-war leaders before General Santos became a city in 1967 is herein presented for better illustration of the changes and development in the Municipality of General Santos.

#### **1. Ireneo Santiago, Period of Reconstruction, 1946 - 1955**

Ireneo L Santiago was from San Fernando, Pampanga. With the recruitment of personnel for the NLSA's Koronadal project, Ireneo was recruited as one of its technical staff working as a staff nurse of the NLSA hospital. In 1946, his inherent advantage as the campaign manager of President Roxas in Koronadal Valley led to his appointment as mayor of the Municipal District of Buayan. His leadership was confirmed in the election of November 1947 where he ran and won as the standard bearer of the Liberal Party. He was reelected four years later making him one of the only two mayors who had the distinction of being reelected into the position of mayor in successive terms.

Mayor Santiago's term was a period of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction. A break with the traditional hold of the NLSA was seen from the

lifting of the ban for the Chinese to operate business in Buayan. Lagao business remained securely in the hands of Filipinos but Dadiangas, the post-war commercial area was 98% Chinese - controlled in a 1952 report. The municipal government on August 17, 1948 formally accepted the Chinese. Consul Mih of the Republic of China came over for a visit afterwards (Ramirez 1993).

The Santiago administration was credited for the establishment of the basic institutions and infrastructures like the wharf, the municipal building costing P19, 700.00, public school buildings, and a constabulary barracks. One of the only two mayors known to win a re-election bid, this popular mayor was not able to withstand the onslaught of the Nacionalista Party, the political party of a very popular president - President Magsaysay, under whose banner his former vice-mayor ran and won in the 1954 election.

## **2. Pedro Acharon, the Candidate of the *Kabus*, 1955-1959**

Mayor Pedro Acharon, dubbed the candidate of the *kabus* (poor), came to Dadiangas twelve years earlier than the 1939 settlers. He joined the "sakada system" and within that program, he worked in the cattle ranch owned by Don Pepe Olarte. Later, he worked in the store owned by the Japanese Kuruda, the owner of the only store in Dadiangas when the 1939 settlers came. As an early migrant, he was able to lay claim over a vast area near Silway River in Dadiangas. He allowed later arrivals who were not able to get land to stay in the Silway area, creating a cadre of loyal followers strongly attached to the Acharons by a strong *utang na loob* syndrome. His marriage to the family of another earlier migrant bolstered his political stock. He entered politics in 1947 running for the position of vice mayor. After playing second fiddle to Mayor Santiago for ten years, Acharon challenged Santiago in the 1955 election propelled by the political party of the popular President Magsaysay.

The Acharon administration concerned itself with the barrio programs of President Magsaysay. Through the PACD (Presidential Assistance for Community Development), feeder roads connecting the remote barrios to the national highways were built. Artesian wells were established to solve the problem of water supply among the rural folks. According to a retired PACD worker who was then assigned in Lagao and Dadiangas, they were able to reduce the P10, 000.00 budget per project to only P3,000.00 per project because labor was provided by the people - a true government-community cooperation (Villano, in an interview, 1997). Likewise, he finished the projects started by Mayor Santiago particularly Makar Wharf which was declared an open port of entry in 1959 by virtue of Resolution No. 8. The Buayan airport was also rehabilitated from the ruins of the war during his term (Banguiran 1987).

The pre-war pattern of producing low rainfall high-valued crops and livestock in Buayan was continued after the war. Thus, while not attractive to ordinary farmers who preferred the production of traditional crops like rice and corn, Buayan's contribution was as the experimental station for high-yielding but non-traditional crops.

At the close of the decade, the pre-war cotton production of Koronadal-Allah valleys was revived by the multi-million Philippine Cotton Development Corporation owned by the controversial Harry Stonehill complementing the cotton production done by the National Development Corporation. Likewise,

livestock production picked up although it “was never able to return to its pre-war level” .

The sixties saw Southern Mindanao experiencing a rapid stride with a 7.4 per cent growth rate between the periods 1948-1960 bypassing the national growth rate by more than 4 per cent (Table 4).

Following the regional trend, the sixties brought the municipality towards further growth and development. At the helm of government after Mayor Pedro Acharon was a doctor. As shown by the experience of Ireneo Santiago, Buayan's first elected mayor, and Dr. Sergio Morales, South Cotabato's first governor, medical personnel, strengthened by his service-oriented role in the community possessed inherent advantage in getting electoral victory.

**Table 4**  
**Population Size Growth of Some Regions**  
**of Mindanao and Sulu, 1903 - 1980**

Census Year	Northern Mindanao	Southern Mindanao	Central Mindanao	RP Growth Rate
A. Size				
1903	266,530	138,583	117,045	2.0
1918	358,970	206,430	220,650	2.1
1939	706,367	450,805	484,148	2.1
1948	922,167	577,663	680,727	2.9
1960	1,297,345	1,352,898	1,383,290	3.1
1970	1,952,735	2,200,726	1,941,457	2.8
1975	2,314,205	2,714,458	2,070,349	2.7
1980	2,758,985	3,346,803	2,270,349	2.5
B. Growth Rates				
1903-18	3.1	2.7	4.3	2.0
1918-39	3.3	3.8	3.8	2.1
1939-48	3.0	2.8	3.9	2.5
1948-60	2.9	7.4	8.2	3.0
1960-70	4.2	5.0	3.5	2.9
1970-75	3.5	4.3	1.3	2.7
1975-80	3.6	4.3	1.9	2.6

Source: Michael A. Castillo, “The Demography of Mindanao,” Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992), p. 34.

### 3. Dr. Jorge Royeca, the Doctor, 1960-1964

Dr. Jorge Royeca, a native of Tayog, Pangasinan finished his medical course in the College of Medicine of the University of the Philippines in 1935. He joined

the NLSA in 1939 serving as a hospital director of the NLSA hospital in Lagao. His civic involvement started with his founding of the Jaycees General Santos where Dr. Royeca was the Charter President. He also became a Charter Grand Knight of Columbus Council 4639, General Santos Municipality (Ramirez 1993).

When Dr. Royeca entered politics in 1959 as a mayoralty candidate under the banner of the Liberal Party, he was already known for his service-oriented role in the community both as a civic leader and as a doctor. Thus, while the previous mayors belonged to the party of the President of the Philippines, Dr. Royeca's election did not follow the national trend.

True to his profession, Dr. Royeca emphasized cleanliness, beautification and health services. During his administration, General Santos Municipality was declared the cleanest town in the province of Cotabato. Anti-littering law was strictly implemented, stray animals were impounded, trees were planted along the national highway, and the continuous beautification of parks and the public plaza was made. Worth mentioning was the successful relocation of the squatters found along the beaches into Alunan Street.

The increase in population necessitated the expansion of services. The Emergency Hospital was established in Lagao. Additional public elementary schools were established in the eastern and northern parts of Dadiangas to complement the two existing public elementary schools in Dadiangas.

In all these undertakings, the active participation of the various civic, religious and business sectors was noticeable. In fact, the conscious effort of promoting the "boom-town Dadiangas" image was an idea hatched by the private and the business sector of the community.

The tapping of the agri-industrial potential of the municipality by capitalists and giant corporations reached a high point in the 60s. Thus, a cassava plantation at Conel was established in 1961 by UDAGRI. By 1964 the General Milling Company was producing flour for domestic consumption. DOLE Philippines was established. Next to the Chinese, most informants as instrumental for the area's rapid stride considered the multinational corporations in the 60s.

The 1964 election saw once more the defeat of a reelectionist mayor. Dr. Royeca, however, would later bounce back to political life as a member of the municipal council in the late seventies and as an assemblyman of Region XI in the early eighties.

#### **4. Lucio Velayo, the Labor Leader, 1964-1967**

Dr. Royeca, despite his sterling performance while in office proved no match to a labor leader in the 1964 election. In a migrant community where status stratification was not clearly defined, neither wealth nor high education was considered the primary consideration in election. It is, therefore, not surprising that a former jeepney driver and insurance agent turned labor leader and businessman became mayor in 1964.

Mayor Lucio Velayo's term saw the establishment of the following projects: the first two public secondary schools: one in Bula and the other in Conel; the establishment of the fire department at the core of the municipality; the concretization of the Philippine National Bank; and the establishment of deep wells in different barangays particularly in Klinan, Conel, and Tinagakan. A sister company of Dole Philippines, the Standard Fruits Company

(STANFILCO) was established in Polomolok in 1963. On May 1, 1967, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company was inaugurated in the municipality.

The administration of Mayor Velayo also saw rapid stride in the field of media communication with the publication of the first local newspaper, the Southern Review, and the establishment of the first radio station, DXGS.

Economic growth gained a very significant leap during Mayor Velayo's term. Multi-million agri-based corporations such as Dole-Philippines, General Milling Corporation and UDAGRI begun operating in the area. This time, the municipality qualified as a fourth class city prompting Congressman Salipada Pendatun to file House Bill 5862 converting General Santos Municipality into a city and renaming it Rajah Buayan City. Unfortunately, the residents in a plebiscite called for the purpose rejected this bill. The failure of the bill converting the General Santos Municipality into a city, however, occurred not in the halls of Congress but in the hollowed halls of the Supreme Court in recognition of the people's "rejection" of their cityhood.

### **Why Reject Cityhood?**

When Buayan became a full pledged municipality in 1947, it was a fourth class municipality. By 1965, its annual income had reached 600,000 pesos qualifying it for a status of fourth-class city. House Bill 5862 was subsequently passed converting the municipality into Rajah Buayan City.

However, opposition to its city hood came. Its city hood became the object of contention between two opposing forces. One group, mostly the so-called pioneering settlers, campaigned for the rejection of city hood. They deeply felt the loss of the name General Santos. To them, the name General Santos had emotional connotation. To this group, the name symbolized everything that the settlement stood for - hope for a better future, land for the landless, the name of a beloved founder, etc.

The other group, on the other hand, couldn't understand the reason for the strong opposition. But their argument was unassailable: cityhood is the gateway to further progress. What's in a name anyway?

The campaign of both sides stretched until plebiscite day with both sides making last-minute campaign near the plebiscite sites. The "yes" garnered 4,422 votes outvoting the 3,066 "no" votes. But opposition remained strong. The first elected mayor of General Santos municipality, Ireneo Santiago, and Eligio Leyva brought the case before the Supreme Court. Their argument was that the 4,422 votes did not constitute the majority of the qualified voters that numbered about 15,727 out of which only 7,488 voted. The Supreme Court that declared and sustained this argument by the petitioners: "the people had rejected the cityhood."

The Supreme Court's decision denied Mayor Lucio Velayo the honor to be called the first city mayor. That distinction belonged to his successor - Mayor Antonio C. Acharon, former Mayor Pedro Acharon's son.

