



GERD ALTMANN | PIXABAY

instead rely on the old form to fill up in every establishment one visits in a day, our alert levels would be at best guesswork. If Omicron is less potent but very transmissible, and we could not keep up with its pace and direction, putting a closure to this “blessing in disguise” of a virus may remain elusive.

The second serious policy failing is bad governance. At a time when people were dying and our public health system is hopelessly overstretched, when the budget is also extended to as far as it could go by way of realignment to fund the health needs of the people, when the government had to incur liabilities in pesos and foreign exchange for lack of public savings — fraud and perhaps plunder in the health sector were allowed to happen. This is a direct assault against public money and a betrayal of public trust. Health recovery feeds economic recovery, and both thrive on people’s trust and ownership of public policy.

No wonder, in the Pulse Asia Research survey on comparative ratings of the Duterte government in managing selected national issues late last year, fighting graft and corruption as well as controlling the spread of COVID-19 scored the lowest after its handling of

economic issues such as controlling inflation and creating more jobs.

But one should not make the mistake of dismissing the growth dynamics of the Philippine economy. In the last 20 years, we had secured the fundamentals necessary to recover and resume growing. Without those policy failings in 2020-2021, the pandemic consequences could have been minimized fast.

We have the benefit of an impressive 21-year growth momentum — from 1999 through 2019 — punctuated only by the pandemic-driven two-year setback. We continue to derive the competitive spirit from nearly three decades of sustained policy and structural reforms. Significant improvements have been recorded in the country’s total factor productivity and economic efficiency in terms of a declining incremental capital output ratio. Demographics are in our favor, with a young labor force with some decent levels of education and training. We have begun the digital shift in many areas of business and banking. Our credit rating remains investment-grade, which is capital market positive.

Looking ahead, what is crucial is whether the public treasury would have enough funds to help finance

