

# Estrada declares second run for presidency

Decision comes amid speculations of a legal bar

by RENE VILLAROMAN  
AJPress

MANILA – Former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada has declared his second presidential bid with running mate, Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay in a rally held in Moriones, Tondo in Manila on Wednesday evening, October 21.

Estrada, who claims that he was unjustly removed from position during what is now called EDSA Dos, reiterated that his removal from power after almost three years into his presidency was the handiwork, allegedly, of “the elite and the ruling class of the Philippines, which heaped lies upon lies and filed bogus and unfounded charges against him to accelerate his removal.”

Although Estrada was viewed by most poor Filipinos as a president with a social conscience, he could not shake off the devastating results of the plunder and *jueteng* (illegal gambling) charges that his political enemies filed against him. In addition, it was widely speculated that he incurred the ire of his predecessor, former President Fidel Ramos, one of the architects of the EDSA “People Power” revolution in February 1986, when he made it his mission to unravel alleged anomalies in the sale of the Fort Bonifacio military reservation and other government-owned military real estate to private land developers.

Estrada’s declaration to run for president a second time has

spurred a spate of healthy debate surrounding his eligibility to run again. Under the 1987 Philippine Constitution, a President is barred from running again after a six-year term. Some legal pundits, including Dean Amado Valdez of the University of the East College of Law, believe that Estrada is eligible to run again for the reason that he did not finish an entire six-year term of office. “Erap can run,” Valdez declared on Wednesday, “because he is not running for re-election. He is making a second run for the presidency.”

The validity of this statement will ultimately depend on the expected Supreme Court ruling. A well-respected legal mind, Chief Justice Puno, has said that it was a matter for the people to decide. On Thursday morning, October 22, Malacanang issued a statement that an ultimate ruling would be made by the SC.

Encouraged by his unprecedented record as the only president elected with 6.5 million vote plurality over his closest rival, Estrada appears determined to forge ahead. “Let’s not lose hope,” he exhorted a visibly adoring audience estimated at about 5,000, huddled in humid and warm conditions on Plaza Hernandez, fronting the centuries-old Santo Nino Church. Speaking mostly in Tagalog, Estrada said, “My belief is strong that together, we can get out of these depths and stand up against the trials because our belief in God is very strong.”

He related that during his incarceration, he was allegedly “flooded with lies, and unfounded and erroneous charges from politicians who are hungry – not in the stomach – but hungry for power and wealth.”

Talking about the bright spots in his administration, Estrada crowed about making Mindanao the “bread basket” of the nation, but he charged that the present administration is allegedly delivering the island to a minority, piece by piece. “Hundreds of thousands of people (in Mindanao) have lost their homes; thousands have perished in the conflict with MILF separatists; and hundreds of soldiers have been ambushed, some of them beheaded; and women have been raped; reporters and priests have been kidnapped. Can we still allow these?”

He said that, as commander-in-chief, he would not allow the division of Mindanao, adding that the nation must unite under one flag, one armed force, one government, and one Republic of the Philippines.

VP bet, Mayor Jejomar “Obama” Binay, the award-winning mayor of Makati City, touted the successful and much-envied social programs in his city, but he did not offer specifics on how to replicate them on a nationwide scale. He is widely respected for his total and unconditional loyalty to Estrada. “Hindi ako nang-iwan (I don’t leave anyone behind), Binay declared. “I never left Erap

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Former President Joseph Estrada presenting his program of government to the masses of Tondo and other supporters from the provinces. AJPress Photo by Rene Villaroman

# Puno out of VP race; Loren declares...

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prompting her security escorts to come to her rescue and swiftly bring her to the left side of the stage. Legarda was not hurt.

Pangasinan Rep. Mark Cojuangco, former presidential adviser Avelino Razon, Antique Gov. Sally Perez, former Nueva Ecija Gov. Tommy Josen, other representatives of groups from General Santos City, Quezon City, Laguna and other urban poor and Muslim groups attended the program that followed Legarda’s Lingkod Loren outreach mission at the Rizal Monument.

Asked who will be her running mate, Legarda said she is ready to team up with anybody who is

ready to work with the same vision she has for the country to move forward economically and through good governance.

“I have outlined by pro-people, pro-country and pro-God agenda... Whoever who can match my platform of government, I am ready to join,” Legarda said in a press conference after the program.

Rep. Cojuangco, for his part, defended the absence of NPC chairman Danding Cojuangco, saying his father need not be present because he has become a “senior statesman” who sees things from a higher point of view.

“He is a senior statesman. Nanood na lang siya (He just watched). My father has done his part for the society,” the congressman said without elaborating.

**Puno: No strings attached**  
Puno shrugged off assumptions that his health was a decisive issue in his withdrawal.

“All rumors of ill-health are just rumors. I will prove my health by going to the various parts of the country. I am perfectly healthy. I have not been bypassed,” he said, adding that there was an increase in his latest acceptance rating.

Puno is confident that his withdrawal from the race will not affect the overall political plan of the ruling coalition for the May 2010 polls.

He said the ruling coalition could easily field a possible running mate of Teodoro.

“I don’t believe that I have the monopoly of experience. There are enough candidates of high quality out there. Naniniwala akong tatanggapin nila ang aking desisyon (I believe they will accept my decision). I wish the party leaders well. I know that they will make the right decisions in the months to come,” he said.

As this developed, Puno, who is also known as an astute political strategist, vowed to remain neutral during the campaign period.

“There is no hidden agenda in withdrawing my bid. I am committing to be non-partisan in the elections,” he said.

Puno said that should he decide to assist any candidate in their campaign for 2010, he would resign as DILG secretary first.

“If ever I will be involved in anybody’s campaign, I will leave my position. In this position, I

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