

Palace, Lakas stalwarts belittle split plan

De Venecia's new cohorts 'retired, inactive'

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ & TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

STALWARTS of the ruling administration party Lakas-Kampi-Christian Muslim Democrats (CMD) talked down moves initiated by Pangasinan Representative Jose de Venecia Jr. and several Lakas "original" members to ally with another party and field their own standard bearer in the 2010 elections.

"Unless we hear it from President Fidel V. Ramos himself, that statement of the group seems to be a statement of De Venecia only," Gabriel Claudio, coalition secretary general, said over dzMM.

News reports published in the major dailies said 50 Lakas "originals" have agreed to split from the Lakas-Kampi-CMD merger under the leadership of Ramos, founder of the Lakas and De Venecia, former speaker and Lakas party stalwart.

According to reports, Ramos was leading the breakaway because he believed that the merger pushed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was against the constitution and bylaws of the Lakas-CMD party.

Speaker Prospero Nograles, current vice chairman of the merged party said those who attended the meeting called by De Venecia in his home Tuesday were already "retired and inactive" and were no longer party members.

But Nograles acknowledged the statement of former President Ramos, who said that the event was just a "social gathering."

Ramos, who was also in the gathering in De Venecia's home in Makati City, said he would not comment on party matters until the Commission on Elections (Comelec) has ruled on the pending case questioning the Lakas-Kampi merger.

"That's the prudent thing to do," Nograles said.

De Venecia in June asked the Comelec to reject the request of Lakas-Kampi for accreditation saying

the merger, which was formalized in May this year, did not go through the process.

During the meeting in his home last Sept. 8, some 50 leaders composed of former officials, senators, congressmen, and local officials gathered and affirmed Ramos as Lakas chairman emeritus and De Venecia as party president. They also signed a resolution creating a committee headed by De Venecia to coalesce with other political parties and choose a presidential candidate they would endorse next year.

But Nograles said the move has no effect on the merged party.

"We remain solid and united despite the media noise created by former Speaker Jose De Venecia and his already retired and inactive so-called former Lakas renegades whose names may have long been removed from our list of active members as they have not been physically attending any of our party meetings in the past," he said in a text message.

In a separate interview, Cebu Representative Pablo Garcia, a member of Lakas-Kampi, said the administration party remains the ruling party for the 2010 election.

"The strength is in the machinery...A candidate is as strong as its machinery," he told reporters in an interview.

Garcia said he is confident Lakas-Kampi will have its standard-bearer soon, adding it will be a strong candidate.

At least two Lakas-Kampi members have expressed plans to run for president: Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Metro Manila Development Authority chairman Bayani Fernando. The party is still awaiting the decision of Vice President Noli De Castro to join the party. ■

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the project is not jeopardized," Jimenez pointed out.

He said the suspension order on Aboitiz is only temporary and there is no reason for the Comelec to be alarmed.

"It's too early to make any conclusion. We will see how long the suspension lasts what it covers etc. The Comelec is prepared to ensure the success of the project," he stressed.

The Comelec earlier sought the services of a subsidiary of Aboitiz for the transport of the ballots and counting machines.

Failure of elections?
Former President Joseph Estrada warned yesterday of a possible "failure of elections" scenario through power outages that would cripple the automated counting machines.

In a speech before the joint meeting of the Rotary Club of Makati, Estrada urged the people to remain vigilant to prevent

massive cheating in next year's elections.

"Under this untested system, the potentials of a failure of elections are real. The computers may be tampered with so as to cause intentional breakdown," he said.

"The wirings of the system may be short-circuited. There may be sudden power failures, accidental or deliberate and worst of all, note that there has been no date set to train teachers and watchers to acquaint themselves with the machines for the elections," Estrada said.

"We must be prepared for a possible failure of elections. This is a scenario that political analysts consider a serious threat and yet a real possibility," he pointed out.

"We must therefore be on guard against the possibilities of sabotage or system failure because these can lead to the declaration of failure of the elections," Estrada said.

He said a failure of elections "can be used as an excuse for the continuation of this regime in a transition government or worse, the declaration of martial law."

"That continuation can also result in the amending of the Constitution to change our system of government from presidential to parliamentary," he said.

Estrada stressed that he does not intend to belittle the competence and integrity of Comelec.

"It (Arroyo administration) is a government that stole the presidency, not only once, but twice. Firstly, from me and later from my friend, Fernando Poe Jr.," he said.

"It is a government that has been enmeshed in continuing and appalling exposés of incidences of graft and corruption one after the other, with the trademark of ZTE-Broadband and Husband. While my trademark is wristband only," Estrada said. ■

YOUTH LEADERS SAY

'Poll automation not a guarantee vs fraud'

by CECILE RODRIGUEZ
Inquirer.net

DAVAO CITY—Edlyn Oliverio, 19, a marketing sophomore at the Ateneo De Davao University, shook her head when asked if she thought the upcoming 2010 national elections would be clean and fraud-free.

"If they want to cheat, it would be easy for them to find ways, even though voting is already automated," said Oliverio, who came with her classmates to listen to a voters' education forum at the Ateneo De Davao auditorium last Sept. 5.

Diana Rose Bongcaras, 21, a Sangguniang Kabataan (youth council) official in Barangay (Village) Buhangin, Davao City, said poll automation would not ensure fraud-free elections.

"In the first place, how can we be assured that the operator of the voting machine is trustworthy? And even the BEIs [board of election inspectors], some of them have been involved in cheating in the past," said Bongcaras.

The voter's education forum was organized by Bantay Eleksyon (Election Watch) 2010 in partnership with Youth Vote Philippines and First Time Voters Inc. to orient students of voting age on poll automation and encourage young people to take part in non-partisan activities to ensure clean and honest elections.

Bantay Eleksyon 2010 is composed of institutions and organizations advocating electoral reforms.

More than 200 students and SK youth leaders came to the forum to listen to Commission on Elections Regional Assistant Director Marlon Quesquero explain poll automation.

Pia Zamora, project coordinator of Tacdrup (Technical Assistance Center for the Development of Rural and Urban Poor), one of Bantay Eleksyon 2010's local implementers, said last Saturday's forum was the second school-based forum held in the city.

"We have conducted more than 20 similar forums in major cities around Mindanao, with varied audiences, from simple farmers to teachers and young professionals," said Zamora.

Zamora said participants in the voters' education forums were excited to learn more about poll automation. "That is understandable because this is a new animal. Another frequently asked question is how politicians could cheat with

this technology."

Both Oliverio and Bongcaras agreed that voters should remain vigilant in protecting the elections from cheaters.

"I encourage my fellow youth to be vigilant and make sure politicians will not be able to cheat," said Oliverio.

YouthVotePhilippines, a coalition of different youth organizations in the country, expects the youth to become a powerful force in the

coming elections.

"Almost 54 percent of the total voting population are the youth. Of the 2.6 million new voters, 80 percent are youth. So that will give you an idea on how important youth participation is. We're still going around asking our fellow youth to register. And additionally, we convince them to be more active, to be vigilant in the coming polls," said Amore Rafanan, regional coordinator of YouthVotePhilippines. ■



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