

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

De Castro top administration bet—Palace

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
Inquirer.net



Vice President Noli De Castro
Photo from adb.org

VICE President Noli De Castro is still the administration's top choice for its standard-bearer in the 2010 presidential election, a Malacañang official said.

Gabriel Claudio, presidential political adviser, described as "highly speculative" the report that De Castro could end up joining another political party outside the administration coalition

for his presidential bid. "Definitely not—he's still on top of the shortlist of presidential materials by the administration coalition," he told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (parent company of *Inquirer.net*) last May 10.

"The report is typical of political armchair analysis and barber-shop talk," he said.

Tony Gatmaitan, executive director of the Political Economic Applied Research (PEAR), announced Saturday that a "new party" to be launched next month could carry De Castro's candidacy.

Claudio said he was convinced that De Castro would "prefer running under the administration coalition than with any other group or under any other scenario once he is ready to take the plunge."

"Any suggestion to the contrary is speculative and smacks of intrigue," he said.

Claudio described as "in the bag, a done deal" the ongoing effort to merge the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi, Partner of the Free Fili-

pino) for the 2010 elections.

In fact, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would preside over the meeting of the two parties' executive committees before the end of the month, said Claudio, also the chair of the unification

committee for the merger.

Claudio said the merger's choice for standard-bearer would be "internally known by July at the latest." He said the public announcement would come in August.

He said the administration was eyeing De Castro because his "clean record as a public official and his mass appeal are clearly established." He also cited De Castro's experience as senator and now vice president and his consistently strong showing in surveys.

"The reasons for his desirability are quite obvious," he said.

Claudio said the administration was not rushing De Castro into a decision.

"The invitation stands," he said. "We're giving him the latitude to calibrate his own response. His

political intuition and sense of timing have served him well."

Besides De Castro, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro was also in the administration's shortlist, he said. But he said Teodoro's chances would still depend on how well he would fare in surveys since he announced his bid more than two months ago.

Claudio declined to identify the third aspirant in the shortlist. But he hastened to add that Bayani Fernando, chair of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, was still "in contention." ■

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Comelec: 2010 poll automation still on

by MAYEN JAYMALIN
Philstar.com

POLL automation in 2010 would push through even with the disqualification of firms bidding to provide automated counting machines (ACMs), the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said last May 10.

Comelec Chairman Jose Melo junked calls to consider partial automation or use P1.2 billion worth of ACMs purchased from the controversial Mega Pacific Consortium (MPC) for the 2004 elections.

Due to various documentary deficiencies, the Comelec last week rejected the bids of all seven foreign and local bidders to supply machines for the automated elections.

Melo said the Comelec has not yet declared a failure of bidding and that there is still time for full automation.

"We have not yet reached a situation where we would opt for partial automation. We have yet to declare a failed bidding," he said.

Melo said the poll body would only opt for partial automation if the winning bidder would tell them that they do not have the time to produce the necessary 80,000 automated machines.

Lawyer Romulo Macalintal, election counsel of President Arroyo, yesterday suggested to the Comelec to consider using the ACMs purchased from the MPC

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