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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Makati Mayor Binay willing to settle for VP

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President Estrada and I could be considered as champions in local governance, having served for several decades as mayor," he said.

Binay said the proper approach to the country's problems is to make the local government units more dynamic and progressive.

With the full support of the local governments, the country will definitely progress, he said.

Binay added Estrada has good chances of winning the presidency again, citing the growing interest of the people with the former leader.

For his part, Estrada said it is too early to tell Binay's fate for 2010.

"It is too early to react," Estrada said. "I believe that Mayor Binay is also one of the most qualified among the presidential candidates of the opposition because of his experience as local chief executive."

Estrada said Binay has made Makati one of the premiere cities in the world.

"He is highly qualified for president," Estrada said.

Estrada's party, the Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino (PMP), declared that they are already preparing for the return of the former leader to Malacañang.

PMP director for political affairs Pablo Casimira said the party is already poised to officially declare

its standard-bearer for the 2010 presidential elections.

In the same statement, the PMP said "the people manifested their full support to President Estrada to be the sure winner in order to restore peace and order and good governance for the benefit of the masses."

Binay, on the other hand, urged security forces to remain neutral in next year's elections.

Binay cited the announcement made by the Philippine National Police (PNP) on Monday creating a task force to investigate and prevent attacks on elected government officials.

"When police officers support candidates, there is political tension in a locality. The tension rises if police officers use their authority to harass opponents and supporters of their favored candidates, tolerate violation of election laws, or allow their men to serve as bodyguards during the campaign," Binay said.

He said the objective of the task force would not be met if the PNP leadership tolerates the political interests of its members.

"If the PNP is serious about this campaign, it should start in its own backyard. It should act decisively and swiftly on these erring police officers," he said. ■

RP VP De Castro- DILG Sec. Ronnie Puno tandem up

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already in the field who have been able to receive public acceptance and confidence," Puno said without naming names.

He added: "I will not try to compete with them. My expertise is in public service, as a background public official. I have always been known as a campaign manager rather than a candidate. But with the experience and loyalty I showed everyone that I served, I will be able to help the next president lead this country beyond 2010 into continued prosperity."

Puno spoke glowingly of De Castro, who leads in all the major surveys on the possible presidential candidates in 2010. "Obviously, Vice President Noli and I work in the same Cabinet. He has shown the capacity to serve."

One of Puno's allies in Kampi, Nueva Ecija Rep. Rodolfo Antonino, was categorical in his view of the possible De Castro-Puno match-up.

"It's a dream team because it combines mass appeal and politi-

cal organization skills," Antonino said.

Puno agreed that he was a *segurista*—"The first thing about being a good campaign manager is to know whether you have a chance or you don't. And I am not prone to suicide."

This is why he did not even consider seeking a Senate seat, he said.

Puno said being a Cabinet official with direct control of local government units would not give him an undue advantage as a vice presidential aspirant.

He said that if it was wrong for him to announce his candidacy, it would be equally wrong for Sen. Francis Pangilinan to have announced his own intention to run for vice president, because "a senator can call a public investigation."

De Castro-Teodoro

But for all that, Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri said the election tandem of De Castro and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro was in the works.

Zubiri said that both De Castro and Teodoro had been invited to attend the Thursday, May 28 merger of Lakas and Kampi.

Lakas executive director Ray Roquero said in a separate interview when asked about the planned presence of the two men at the merger ceremony to be presided over by Ms Arroyo at Manila Hotel.


Secretary Gabriel Claudio, Ms Arroyo's adviser on political affairs, agreed that the shirts had a "striking similarity."

"Teodoro's green stripes were lighter compared to Noli's," Claudio observed on the phone. But he refused to say if this meant that Teodoro, a known presidential aspirant, would eventually slide down to serve as De Castro's running mate.

He added that the merger would unite the ranks of the ruling coalition in the 2010 polls and significantly increase the chances of its standard-bearer "in the face of a divided opposition." ■

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