

# Ex-RP President Ramos slams Lakas-Kampi merger

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consultation among officials and members of the party. "I think there was enough consultation. Everybody was invited. If he (FVR) feels there are loopholes, then we are amenable to amendments he may propose. We're flexible. I think we can work this out," Nograles said,

brushing aside insinuations that Ramos was not even invited to the convention. Ramos' spokesman, Ed Malay, said the former president was not even accorded the courtesy of being given a copy of the proposed bylaws and constitution of the Lakas-Kampi-CMD.

At the very least, Ramos said there were some procedural lapses in the way the merger was carried out.

He said it violated the internal rules of Lakas-CMD that specifically state that mergers with other political parties should be passed and approved by the national directorate as well as the general assembly.

Also not considered by those who worked for the merger were the implications it will create in the links of Lakas with the Centrist Democratic International, an international political body with significant presence in many foreign governments in Europe and Asia.

Ramos, however, did not comment on reports that Lakas "originals" would bolt the merged party and form a new one.

Claudio said he moved the scheduled launching of the two parties a week later to accommodate and wait for Ramos, only to find out he was boycotting the event.

Last May 29, the Palace moved to stop the widening rift between Ramos and Mrs. Arroyo on the matter.

Claudio said he sought a meet-

ing with the former leader this weekend.

"I'm willing to be chewed out by him," he said in Filipino, adding that he remains confident the "questions and reservations he has about the merger are not fatal."

"We look forward to his being a fountainhead of inspiration and guidance as chairman emeritus. This time, not only of Lakas, but the bigger family that it has become through the merger with Kampi," Claudio said.

### Crack in the party

Claudio also downplayed reports of a rift in the newly formed party and said they are now mobilizing its political machinery to insure victory in the 2010 elections.

He said the issue raised by Kampi president Luis Villafuerte and Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) chairman Bayani Fernando is also being addressed.

Villafuerte and Fernando also did not attend the ceremonies.

The MMDA chair said he stayed away from the ceremonies because his own party snubbed his offer and would rather have an "outsider" as its standard-bearer.

The merged party has reportedly narrowed its choices for presidential candidate to either Vice President Noli de Castro or Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro.

Although they are not party members, De Castro and Teodoro showed up at the merger ceremonies at Manila Hotel.

Fernando said he will stick it out with the party despite his criticism of the party leaders.

But he lamented that there is an obvious preference of some party leaders for candidates who are not even Lakas or Kampi members and they have been ignoring party loyalists like him and other long-time card bearers.

Villafuerte, who now considers himself an independent, said Lakas and Kampi lost their "juridical personality" with the formation of a new administration party.

But Nograles, who is Lakas president, expressed confidence that disputes on the local level, which critics of the merger claim would result in the divorce of the fused parties, could be resolved.

He said there are only a few areas where such disputes exist, adding that he would be happy if 80 percent of these conflicts were resolved before next year's elections.

In the Davao provinces, Lakas and Kampi officials led by Nograles have forged an agreement to field and support a common ticket, from president down to mayoral candidates.

The local disputes were blamed for the embarrassing defeat of President Arroyo's senatorial ticket in the 2007 elections. Only three of the administration's 12 candidates won.

The best example of a conflict area in 2007 was

Villafuerte's own home province, where his governor-son sought reelection under Lakas while he reportedly supported another candidate, former Rep. Eduardo Pilapil.

Claudio clarified that the merger of the two leading parties has led to a single authority that will govern the selection of candidates from the national to the local levels.

"Only a few leaders remain outside the party ambit, but we expect them not to stay out too long, because we have a place for everyone and we have an election to win," said Ray Roquero, former Lakas-CMD executive director.

### Strange bedfellows

But while they may look like strange bedfellows, administration lawmakers said they are staying together to make things work out.

Cebu City Rep. Antonio Cuenco conceded that there are "issues" within the new ruling political group that need to be resolved, "but these are too minor to cause rift or dissension within the merged parties."

"Lakas-CMD will not divorce Kampi. Just like a newly married couple, adjustments have to be made in a conscious effort to ensure that there will be no divorce," he said.

Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III, a Kampi member, said the reported cracks in the party "are actually certain personalities who have been opposed to the merger for their own reasons."

He said that with these personalities now out, the merged Lakas-Kampi-CMD would be stronger.

"It's called survival of the fittest. We always emerge stronger and better if we weed out some for the species to survive. And as partymates, we are willing to let go of our personal ambitions for the benefit of the party and the country in general," he said.

Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, on the other hand, predicted that national and local candidates of the merged political powerhouse will sweep the May 2010 elections.

### Headed for collapse

But De Venecia boldly predicted that the merged party will eventually disintegrate like the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) of the late President Ferdinand Marcos.

"Lakas-Kampi-CMD is like the KBL of the late President Marcos. It became a monster and it collapsed," the former Lakas founder said.

He said signs of disunity among members of the new party were evident in Thursday's merger ceremonies.

"Many leaders of Lakas-CMD - congressmen, governors, mayors—were not invited and did not attend," he added.

On the eve of the merger, De Venecia resigned as Lakas president emeritus because he opposed the union of the two parties. ■

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