

# Estrada endorses Pacquiao candidacy

by AQUILES ZONIO  
Philstar.com

GENERAL SANTOS CITY – He is the icon of the opposition while the other one is a staunch supporter of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

But this did not prevent former president Joseph Estrada, who was sentenced and detained for corruption under Arroyo's government, to support boxing champion Manny Pacquiao's political plans for 2010.

"I am behind his plans," he said in Filipino during a visit here on Thursday.

Pacquiao earlier confirmed his plan to run in the 2010 race for the lone congressional district of Sarangani province.

Estrada came to see the boxing champion shortly before lunch, after visiting nearby Polomolok, South Cotabato, on Thursday.

Estrada was accompanied by Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and former senator Ernesto Maceda.

The former president, a staunch critic of Arroyo, said he supported Pacquiao's plan because he was pro-poor like him.

"His heart and mind is with the poor so we are not totally different," he said at a lunch hosted by the Pacquiao at a his mansion here.

Estrada said he did not mind if Pacquiao belonged to the other side of the political fence.

"Even if we belong to a different party, our feelings are the same (for the poor)," he said.

But the former president clarified that his support for Pacquiao did not indicate that the boxing icon's party, People's Champ Movement (PCM), was already merging with his Partido ng Masang Pilipino (PMP).

"I have not made any commitment to that effect to anybody," he said.

Before announcing his support for the boxer, Estrada said his main intention in coming over was "to thank GenSan residents for giving me unwavering support as senator, vice president then as president."

At the luncheon meeting, Estrada raised Pacquiao's hand and said: "The whole country supports Manny and so do I."

The boxing superstar was visibly overjoyed by the endorsement.

"Masayang-masaya ako dahil sa suportang ibinigay niya (I'm very happy because of the support he's giving me)," he said after Estrada left for Sarangani province.

He said Estrada's support was important not only for his boxing career but also for his dream of becoming a successful politician. ■



SMOOTH SAILING. Craftsmen work on a 16-yard (48 foot) replica of an ancient Malay boat locally known as a balangay, used 1,700 years ago, inside a shelter Wednesday, June 17, in Pasay City south of Manila. The first Filipinos to conquer Mount Everest hope to sail around Southeast Asia and then to Africa in the replica - a feat they hope will inspire unity in the politically fractious Philippines, organizers said Wednesday.  
AP Photo by Pat Roque

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PAGE A14 ◀

cases of human trafficking and ordered state lawyers to appeal their case before the courts to prioritize the prosecution of human trafficking cases.

Devanadera told prosecutors to "address issues concerning delay in prosecution of pending

human trafficking cases at the department."

She revealed a total of 679 cases of human trafficking filed before the Justice Department from 2003, when the anti-trafficking in persons law was enacted, to last year.

Devanadera said 253 cases

are pending resolution at the department, 229 have already been filed in court while the others had been filed in connection with violation of related laws, dismissed or withdrawn.

Blancaflor, for his part, said the US decision to place the Philippines in the human trafficking watch list is "demoralizing."

"It's very demoralizing for us who are very much involved in the fight against human trafficking for the simple reason that we did have a conviction in Cebu in March 2009," he added.

He said the downgrade would send the wrong message that the Philippine government failed in its global obligation to eradicate human trafficking.

Blancaflor said IACAT has been working under difficult circumstances, specifically without any budget allocation from the government.

What little funding they have to work with comes from foreign governments and organizations, he said.

"Financial support comes from the budget and in the last five years, the IACAT has not been funded. Although we've been asking funds regularly, the final version of the budget does not reflect funding for the IACAT," Blancaflor said. ■

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