

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

'Charter change on but 2010 polls to push through'

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

THE 2010 presidential elections will push through despite the insistent Charter change (Cha-cha) campaign of President Arroyo's congressional allies, leaders of her two political parties said last April 13.

Speaker Prospero Nograles, who is president of Lakas, and Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, head of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), announced last April 13 their resignation as heads of their parties to fast-track the merger of the two political forces and prepare for the 2010 presidential elections.

Nograles and Villafuerte announced during a news confer-

ence their resignation as heads of their parties to give President Arroyo a free hand to determine the appropriate leadership structure for the "consolidated party."

The Speaker told reporters that preparations the two biggest political parties are making should reassure the public that next year's polls would be held as scheduled despite the Charter change (Cha-cha) initiative.

"That also means that we are not extending our terms of office," he said.

Villafuerte said Lakas and Kampi are on "electoral preparations mode" and that should erase doubts that next year's elections would be canceled and Cha-cha would shift the nation to the parliamentary system.

The two party leaders said such preparations and their Cha-cha campaign are "unrelated" and that efforts to amend the Constitution could be separately pursued.

Villafuerte is the author of a resolution that seeks to convene members of Congress into a constituent assembly (con-ass) to propose Charter amendments.

He has left the job of filing the resolution to Nograles, who said he would do it within the week.

The con-ass resolution has 175 signatories, 22 signatures short of Villafuerte's target of 197 to bypass senators who oppose Cha-cha.

Nograles said a majority vote in the House and a majority in the Senate would be required

to convene Congress into a con-ass.

Villafuerte said his resolution calls upon "members of Congress," not on the "institutions" of the House and the Senate, to meet as a con-ass.

The two political leaders said they are giving Lakas and Kampi officials 45 days to merge the two parties.

They said a merged Lakas-Kampi "will allow if not compel administration allies to field single electoral tickets at the local level, thus enabling them to work for the victory of national candidates with greater unity and focus."

"We exhort all members of the administration coalition to rally their respective followers and constituents in support of

the President's call for honest, efficient and credible automated elections in May of 2010 to bring about greater political stability in our country," they added.

Malacañang welcomed the resignations of Nograles and Villafuerte as heads of Lakas and Kampi to guarantee the merger of the two parties.

Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio thanked Nograles and Villafuerte "for their statesmanship in offering their resignations as party presidents in order to facilitate the formal consolidation of the two parties into one."

"It signifies the determination of the two parties to prepare in earnest for next year's polls and achieve victory through a united

national machinery," Claudio said.

"The joint declaration also provides one of the best guarantees from Congress itself that the elections in 2010 will proceed as scheduled and there will be no extensions of the terms of incumbent officials," he said.

He said consultations with party members show clear support for the merger.

Nograles said that former President Fidel Ramos would retain his position as chairman emeritus of Lakas, but there is no decision yet on Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. who co-founded Lakas with Ramos.

"I do not know about Joe (de Venecia), but FVR will keep his post," Nograles said. ■

More queries on P11-B poll bid answered

by ANNA VALMERO
Inquirer.net

AS the bidding for one of the world's biggest election automation contracts draws near, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) continues to clarify technical details about the P11-billion deal.

The Comelec Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) last April 13 issued its sixth supplemental bid bulletin containing clarifications on the project, SBAC chairman Ferdinand Rafanan said.

The bids of 10 participating companies are scheduled to be opened on April 27.

Rafanan said vendors can submit questions until April 17, and the SBAC will answer these queries in supplemental bid bulletins no later than April 20.

"We have answered about 70 percent of bidder queries on the terms of reference and request for proposal (TOR/RFP)," he said, noting that bid bulletins become part of the P1-million bid documents.

To prepare for the opening of bids and technical evaluation of machines, the SBAC is also studying laws and procedures on government procurement.

At the same time, Rafanan said the bids committee "will issue in a bid bulletin the checklist of documents and requirements for the opening of bids, to be released hopefully before April 17. Vendors must follow the checklist we will issue to facilitate the bidding process."

After the bids are opened,

the vendors will demonstrate to Comelec how their machines work end-to-end—from counting to electronic transmission to consolidation to canvassing. This demonstration from April 30 to May 8 will help Comelec evaluate the bids.

The nine-page sixth bid bulletin (http://www.comelec.gov.ph/invi2bid/2009/Bid_Bulletin_No6_041309.html) also contains the following clarifications:

- The Comelec requires 82,200 units, of which 80,136 units will be deployed in various precincts nationwide and 2,064 units for standby.

- Although the machine allocation provided in the RFP does not cover the overseas absentee voting areas, the system must accommodate configurations for participating OAV countries if Comelec decides to implement the same system there.

- The machine must reject fake, spurious, and previously scanned ballots, including other sheets of paper without the required security features.

- Once the machine has read and scanned 1,007 ballots allocated for one precinct (1,000 from voters clustered in a precinct plus seven for the BEI members), the unit must refuse to accept additional ballots and a message on the unit screen should indicate such.

- The machine must have error recovery features, such as full system recovery without data loss from an unexpected

system shutdown. This includes the ability to continue where the system left off after system re-start, with appropriate instruction to the user.

- The bidder must include an uninterrupted power supply (UPS) for each canvassing unit.

- Alternative power sources should be made available for all units in case power failure occurs.

- The machine needs to have multiple data storage devices to function as backup in case of transmission issues. The vendor can include in its unit any removable data storage device, provided it is closed from further write operations.

- The electronic transmission service has to be above 99 percent of the time. For areas without power and telecommunications facilities, the winning bidder has to provide for these required facilities and include them in the proposal. Communications coverage should be 100 percent.

- The data from the machines such as election results, must have three transmissions: to the server for city or municipal board of canvassers for canvassing; to the server for central server for backup and monitoring purposes; and to the server for the Kapisanan ng Brodkaster ng Pilipinas—to be made accessible to an accredited citizen's arms and political parties—as mandated by Republic Act 9369 or the poll automation law. ■

'Palace helpless to stop Charter change'

MANILA—Malacañang claimed last April 14 that it was helpless in stopping its allies in Congress from pushing ahead with Charter change or Cha-cha.

Presidential adviser on political affairs Gabriel Claudio said that while lawmakers have become more preoccupied with preparations for the 2010 elections, the Palace has no power to stop them from rekindling efforts to amend the Constitution.

Claudio pointed out that the two leaders of the administration's biggest political parties, Speaker Prospero Nograles of Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino, have acknowledged that having the Constitution amended before 2010 is a long shot because of the lack of time.

Claudio emphasized that the administration has been preparing for the 2010 elections, particularly the selection of the candidates for all the elective posts and the merger of its two political parties.

Though both Nograles and Villafuerte are allies of President Arroyo, Claudio said the Palace has no

intention of telling them what to do on the issue of Charter change.

Villafuerte, in particular, wants Congress to convene into a constituent assembly to jumpstart Charter change.

On the Social Weather Stations survey result indicating that two

of every three Filipinos oppose Charter change designed to extend Mrs. Arroyo's term, Claudio said that it has no relevance on the Palace because "we are on an election mode and that is exactly what we are preparing for in 2010." (Philstar.com)

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Teodoro hedges on presidential bid

by ERIKA TAPALLA
Inquirer.net

MANILA—After announcing in March his plans to run for president in the 2010 elections, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. is now avoiding giving categorical answers about his political ambitions.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there," he said at a press conference when asked if he would be willing to run for senator instead if asked by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats or the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi, Partner of the Free Filipino).

Teodoro says he first needs to see the outcome of the efforts at a Lakas-Kampi merger.

"If there's a merger, then there will be one party naturally, or a surviving party, and naturally, those who want to contend to

be the standard bearer of the administration must join that party," Teodoro, who is a member of the Nationalist People's Coalition, said.

He also said he has to wait for the selection process for administration standard bearer because, "sometimes the process makes the person also," and candidates who may not be mentioned at the moment could still emerge.

The defense secretary said he believes everyone has "a fair chance" of being chosen.

"Pag hindi ako kinuha at sumali ako sa selection process, incumbent sa akin na tanggapin yun [If I am not chosen and I submitted to the selection process, it is incumbent on me to accept that]," he said.

In the meantime, he said he would continue to focus on his work as defense secretary.



Defense Sec. Gilbert Teodoro

"Hindi ko sasakripisyuhin 'yung mga kailangan kong gawin bilang secretary of national defense upang makamit ng anumang pogi [I will not sacrifice what I need to do as secretary of national defense just to score popularity] points or whatnot," Teodoro said. ■

Left groups to unite for 2010 elections

To end status quo of traditional politicians

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

MILITANT party-list groups, progressive organizations, and their allied forces have forged a grand coalition to push for "politics of change" in the May 2010 election.

Senators, congressmen, and local officials are also expected to show up when the Makabayang Koalisyon ng Mamamayan (Makabayan or Patriotic Coalition of Citizens) is formally launched on April 16 at 9am at the University of the Philippines-Bahay ng Alumni, according to an advisory by the party-list group Bayan Muna (People First).

Bayan Muna Representative Satur Ocampo said Makabayan will evolve on a platform of politics of change and would seek to thrust alternative leaders both in the local and national levels in next

year's election.


"The aim is to end the status quo dominated by traditional politicians," he told Inquirer.net in a phone interview last April 14.

Ocampo said progressive forces have achieved a "breakthrough" when three of its party-list groups, Bayan Muna, Gabriela, and Anakpawis, won seats in the House of Representatives.

"But we recognize that this is limited in the local level, we want to expand it to national level," the lawmaker said.

Ocampo said the coalition will endorse party-list groups and may support the candidacy of several local candidates and senatorial bets.

He declined to comment when asked to confirm his plans to seek a senatorial seat. ■



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