

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Erap-Chiz tandem looms in 2010

by JOSE RODEL CLAPANO & CHRISTINA MENDEZ
Philstar.com

FORMER President Joseph Estrada wants Sen. Francis "Chiz" Escudero to be his running mate if he decides to run for president in 2010, a source from the opposition said.

The source, who requested anonymity, said Estrada prefers Escudero over Sen. Loren Legarda and Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay because of his good ratings in surveys.

"Escudero is the strongest vice presidential candidate among the opposition. President Estrada is inclined to choose Escudero. The next survey is coming in 10 days and that will be a deciding factor," the source said.

Sought for comment, Escudero said the former president had not discussed the matter with him.

A recent Social Weather Stations survey reportedly placed Estrada on top among the presidential candidates, followed by Sen. Manuel Villar, Escudero, Vice President Noli de Castro, and Legarda.

Estrada earlier said that Sen. Manuel Roxas II turned down his appeal for support for a single opposition presidential candidate and that the senator voiced his determination to run in 2010 as standard-bearer of the Liberal Party. Villar has also declared his intention to run for president in 2010 with the Nacionalista Party.

"I already met with Roxas. He told me that there was no stopping him from running for president in 2010. He was the first among opposition presidential candidates that I met with," Estrada said.

Estrada said he will also meet with Escudero, Villar and Binay. "I will be meeting them one by one to get their position in my pursuit to unify the opposition in fielding a single presidential candidate in 2010. As I have said, if I will not be able to unite the opposition to support a single candidate, I will definitely run for president next year," Estrada said, adding he hopes to make a decision next month.

The source said Estrada is not eyeing Legarda because of "gender problem."

"Legarda is the last to be considered among the possible vice presidential candidates of President Estrada because of her gender problem. The people might say, 'babae na naman (a woman again),' " the source said, apparently referring to President Arroyo, whose administration is hounded by allegations of profligacy and high-level corruption.

"Legarda's survey rating nose-dived and she landed sixth. Aside from her gender problem, the survey is another consideration in choosing a tandem in 2010," the source said.

For his part, Binay said he is willing to slide down to vice president for the sake of opposition unity.

"I have always said that for one to be a good leader, one must be a good follower," Binay said. "I am willing to consider running for vice president in the interest of unifying the opposition."

Open to unity talks

Escudero said he is open to Estrada's call for "unity talks" but did not say if he is willing to slide down to become running mate to a common opposition standard-bearer.

"We haven't talked yet, but if he invites me for a meeting I will go," he said.

"I haven't announced anything," he said of the possibility of his running for president under the Nationalist People's Coalition. "If ever, what I have is my dream," he said.

"Let us not preempt things. (Estrada) and I have the same dream. That is to unite the opposition," he added.

He also debunked Malacañang's declaration that it is Estrada who is splitting the opposition.

"What do you expect Malacañang to say? Will they say that we are united? No," he said.

Asked what he would sacrifice to unite the opposition, Escudero said he has not even declared his presidential bid.

Unlikely to back out

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said he does



Former Pres. Joseph Estrada



Sen. Francis 'Chiz' Escudero

not see Villar and Roxas withdrawing from the presidential race.

"Maybe they are just testing the waters but that is the problem. Who will withdraw from the race? Mar Roxas or Manny Villar? These people will not give in so I guess we will have many candidates which I think is splitting the opposition," Pimentel said.

Pimentel said the candidates should give way if they want a unified opposition. "I am still dreaming about it. By November, I will have to come out because that's the time they will declare their bids. For the moment, I don't want to antagonize anybody unnecessarily," Pimentel said.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile said "any candidate for a public office like the presidency would of course divide the votes always."

"Any withdrawal from the race will consolidate votes for some people," Enrile noted.

Erap-Binay backers

Meanwhile, students from the University of Makati and the University of the East have voiced support for an Estrada-Binay tandem.

The students were members of the Movement of the Youth for Empowerment, Reform, Advocacy and Progress (MyERAP).

"UMAK students support former President Joseph Estrada because he remains to be the most viable candidate to replace GMA next year," MyERAP spokesman Ginno Jaralve said.

"Other than his familiarity with the executive job and 31 years of experience in government, they believe that he has a clear vision and political will to move the country forward."

Jaralve said the UMAK students believe Estrada has already learned his lessons.

"The students trust that he has learned from what happened in 2001, and that his presidential knowledge will enable him to reverse the mis-governance of the Arroyo administration," he said.

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