

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Villar lauds outgoing Archbishop Oscar Cruz

NACIONALISTA Party President Senator Manny Villar is saddened by the retirement of Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines or CBCP but expresses confidence in newly named replacement Bishop Socrates Villegas.

"As many of us are well aware of, Archbishop Cruz is undoubtedly the most outspoken leaders of the CBCP. He is very vigilant in standing up against graft and corruption, human rights abuse, bad governance, social injustice, and other ills of the government and the society in general," said Villar.

As early as two years ago, Archbishop Cruz has asked the Vatican for early retirement but it was just recently accepted by the Pope. The former CBCP president will turn 75, the mandatory retirement age, on November 17. Archbishop Cruz's retirement and the appointment of Bishop Villegas as successor were announced last Sept. 8 in Vatican.

"I witnessed first-hand the unwavering dedication and firm stance against corruption of Archbishop Cruz when as chair of the Senate Committee on Public Order, we worked together during the *jueteng* (illegal numbers game) investigation. He was untiring in his efforts in protecting the witnesses and seeking for the truth," said Villar.

Born in 1934, Archbishop Cruz was ordained priest at the age of 27 on February 10, 1962. He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Manila on March 4, 1976 and as archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan on July 5, 1991. He also served as CBCP president from 1995 to 1999.

According to the CBCP, the archbishop will be succeeded by Balanga Bishop Socrates Villegas, former auxiliary bishop to the charismatic Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin. At 48, Bishop Villegas will become the country's youngest archbishop.

Villar also extends his best wishes for Bishop Villegas, who like Cruz, was considered as a protégé of the late Cardinal Sin. In a media statement, Cruz said he is "very happy with my forthcoming successor, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, whom I know to be a man of integrity and competence."

Along with Archbishop Cruz last year, Bishop Villegas was among the five bishops who declared that "that the time for a new government is now." They strongly condemned corruption in government that they said had become "endemic, massive, systemic and rampant in our politics." The others who called for radical reforms were CBCP president and Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, Masbate Bishop Joel Baylon and Legazpi Bishop-Emeritus Jose Sorra.

The bishop followed the group's declaration with a statement on Nov. 27, also last year, calling on the faithful to "fight the sin of graft and corruption" and not to leave the solution to corrupt officials.

Bishop Villegas was born on September 28, 1960 in Manila and was ordained to the priesthood on October 5, 1985. He was appointed Bishop in July 25, 2001. He was ordained Bishop in August 31, 2001 and became Auxiliary Bishop of Manila and Rector of Mary Queen of Peace, Our Lady of EDSA Shrine from December 8, 1989 to May 2004. He was later

appointed Bishop of Balanga in May 3, 2004 and was installed July 3, 2004. ■

47M Filipinos expected to vote—Comelec

by ANNA VALERMO
Inquirer.net

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) expects about 46 to 47 million Filipinos will register for next year's polls, its spokesman said.

James Jimenez made the projection based on the 45,487 million voters, including 2.72 million first-time voters, who have enlisted with the poll body between December 2008 and June this year.

"We estimate that the total number of registered voters for the 2010 elections will be between 46 [million] to 47 million. Right now we have 45,487,634 voters and we expect more voter applicants as we near the registration deadline set on October 31," said Jimenez.

Jimenez said the estimated number of voters for the 2010 general elections is in close range with that of the 2007 polls' 48,218 million.

Driving this are the high interest of Filipinos to participate during presidential elections and the increasing awareness on electoral participation, espe-

cially among first time voters, he said.

Jimenez lauded the registered youth and first-time voters whose total number reached 2.736 million—close to the number estimated by Comelec—according to the approved voter records from the Comelec Election and Barangay Affairs Department (EBAD).

EBAD director Teopisto Elnas said between December 2008 to June this year, the Comelec has delisted 6.159 million voters from the computerized voters' list mainly due to failure to vote in two elections and death.

Elnas said the Comelec Election Registration Board has also approved 3.409 million voters in the last three quarterly hearings.

These include new voters, reactivated records at 126,744, transferred records within a municipality or another at 697,837, voters who filed inclusion and reinstatement of records at 146,290, and voters who filed change or correction of entries at 230,610, he said. ■

Teodoro ready to face Noynoy

by JAIME LAUDE
Philstar.com

BLOOD is thicker than politics.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. declared he would expect to be pitted against his first cousin Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III in case the ruling coalition chooses him as presidential candidate in the 2010 elections.

Teodoro though stressed he will not allow politics to destroy his good relations with Aquino and his relatives.

"The public must expect a higher degree and level of politics to happen next year in an event me and Noynoy will be squaring off in the presidential race," Teodoro said.

Aquino declared he would be running in the 2010 elections as presidential candidate under the Liberal Party.

Teodoro, on the other hand, is hoping to get the final nod of the ruling Lakas-Kampi-CMD party.

Teodoro, who had just joined the party last month, said he has to wait for the result of the selection process by the ruling coalition.

The Lakas-Kampi-CMD is expected to choose its standard-bearer on Sept. 16.

"We represent something else. We represent a party for the non-personal self," he said.

Teodoro said his relationship with Aquino would be beyond politics.

Teodoro belongs to the Cojuangcos, in the same vein as Aquino's late mother, former President Corazon Cojuangco Aquino.

Teodoro said he expects voters next year to vote under party principles instead of going personal.

"This is a healthy political development, especially in our province (Tarlac). Both of us represent something else," Teodoro said.

Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, on the other hand, declared his preference for Teodoro.

Puno, co-vice chairman of Lakas-Kampi-CMD, made known his preference as he offered himself as vice presidential candidate of the administration party.

"We believe that with Secretary Teodoro as our presidential

standard-bearer and I, speaking for myself as an aspirant for vice president, believe that running with (him) is going to be a winning move," Puno said.

Puno described Teodoro as "a very strong candidate."

"And I'm confident that with him as our presidential candidate Lakas-Kampi will go very far and actually win this elections," he said.

Puno made the declaration in a news conference at the Philippine National Police (PNP) headquarters at Camp Crame, hours after Sen. Aquino announced his candidacy.

Puno clarified he is not trying to steal the limelight from Aquino in calling the press conference to announce his preference for Teodoro.

According to Puno, the defense chief has the support of the majority of governors and congressmen.

"I think about 80 percent of the governors throughout the country are supporting Gibo. I would say that in terms of Congress, very easily you would have 80 to 100 congressmen that will declare their support for Gibo," he said. ■

Lakas originals a washed-out group with no clout

INTERIOR Secretary Ronaldo Puno belittled the move of former President Fidel Ramos and Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. to bolt from the Lakas-Kampi-CMD coalition, saying it was merely a ploy by a "washed-out" group to call attention to themselves.

Puno, co-vice chairman of the merged Lakas-Kampi-CMD, said the move by Ramos and De Venecia's group to question the merger before the Commission on Elections (Comelec) was a desperate effort "of people with no public support" to speak of.

"Their moves are really suspect," Puno remarked.

Puno questioned the timing of the move. He said Ramos and De Venecia should have made the effort to talk with party leaders in late May or early June, shortly after the merger took place.

Speaker Prospero Nograles, co-vice chairman of Lakas-Kampi-CMD, also downplayed the reported revolt by original Lakas members led by Ramos and De Venecia.

He said the merger remains strong and the two administration parties remain united despite the move by some of its disgruntled members.

"We remain solid and united despite the media noise created by former Speaker Joe de V.," Nograles said, referring to the group of Ramos

and De Venecia.

Both Ramos and De Venecia, along with scores of Lakas members, decided on Monday to coalesce with other political groups and support their own presidential candidate in next year's elections.

Nograles belittled the strength of the Ramos-De Venecia faction, saying it is composed of "retired and inactive former Lakas renegades whose names may long have been removed from our list of active members as they have not been attending our party meetings."

Malacañang also belittled the threat of Ramos and De Venecia to break away and join the opposition.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said it would be better for De Venecia to wait for the Comelec to decide on his petition.

Ermita said it was understandable that Ramos would appear with De Venecia in the meetings with Lakas originals since most of those who attended were his friends.

Ermita though refused to answer questions on where Ramos' sympathy lay.

"I don't want to claim to speak for President Ramos. The former president is a founder and chairman emeritus of the party," he said. (Philstar.com)

Escudero: Yes to team-up with Estrada

by ORLANDO DIROY
Inquirer.net



Sen. Escudero

DIGOS CITY, Davao Del Sur—Senator Francis Escudero on Tuesday, Sept. 7, said he would be open to teaming up with former President Joseph Estrada for the 2010 elections but not to a tan-

dem with Senator Manny Villar in 2010.

Escudero, who was guest of honor during the city's 9th founding anniversary, however, clarified that he was not making any formal announcement about his intentions for higher office before his 40th birthday.

"When I reach 40, my decision will be made known," he told reporters here in Filipino.

But if ever he made up his mind, Escudero said there was zero probability of him teaming up with Villar due to the C-5 double funding controversy the former Senate president was embroiled in.

Escudero declared his commitment to good governance and added he would not tarnish such a pledge by associating with Villar whose involvement in the anomaly has become clear.

"Based on the evidence I saw, based on the (pieces of) evidence presented to the Senate in connection with the C-5 controversy, the case against him is strong," he

said.

Escudero said his conscience would not allow him to team up with Villar.

He said he would rather run with former president Joseph Estrada, who supported his candidacy for the Senate in 2007.

Estrada was convicted of plunder in September 2007 and he accepted a grant of pardon from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo a month later that freed him from a 20-year prison term.

But for Escudero, "*Anuman ang hugis, anuman ang hitsura, ano man ang porma ang important magkasama sana kami* (Whatever the shape, look, and form of the team-up, what would be important is we are together)," Escudero said.

He said like Estrada, he also wanted the opposition to unite so agreeing to an Estrada-Escudero tandem would help.

"We have the same vision and that is to unite the opposition," he said. ■

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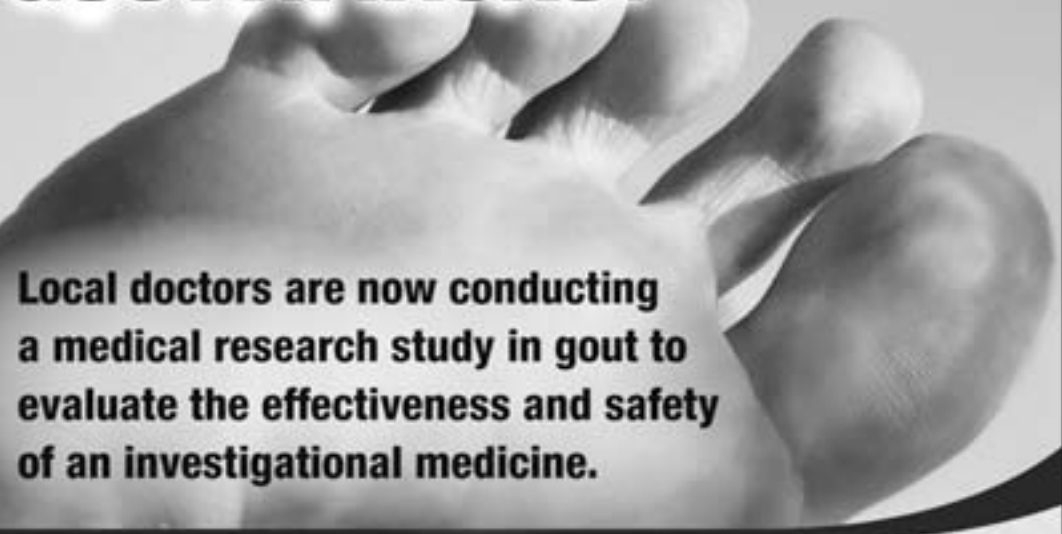
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