

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# Estrada declares second run...

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ed that his removal from power after almost three years into his presidency was the handiwork, allegedly, of "the elite and the ruling class of the Philippines, which heaped lies upon lies and filed bogus and unfounded charges against him to accelerate his removal."

by most poor Filipinos as a president with a social conscience firmly in place, he could not shake off the devastating results of the "plunder" and "jueteng" (illegal gambling) charges that his political enemies filed against him. In addition, it was wildly speculated that he incurred the ire of his predecessor, former President Fidel Ramos, one of the architects of

the EDSA "People Power" revolution in February 1986, when he made it his mission to unravel alleged anomalies in the sale of the Fort Bonifacio military reservation and other government-owned military real estate to private land developers.

Estrada's declaration to run for president a second time has spurred a spate of healthy debate surrounding his eligibility to run again. Under the 1987 Philippine Constitution, a President is barred from running again after a six-year term. Some legal pundits, including Dean Amado Valdez of the University of the East College of Law, believe that Estrada is eligible to run again for the reason that he did not finish an entire six-year term of office. "Erap can run," Valdez declared, "because he is not running for re-election. He is making a second run for the presidency."

Whether that reasoning holds water would ultimately depend on an expected Supreme Court ruling regarding this technicality. A well-respected legal mind, Chief Justice Puno, has said that it was a matter for the people to decide. On Thursday morning, October 22, Malacanang, not surprisingly, issued a statement that an ultimate ruling would be made by the SC.

Encouraged by his unprecedented record as the only president elected with 6.5 million vote plurality over his closest rival, Estrada appears determined to forge ahead. "Let's not

lose hope," he exhorted a visibly adoring audience estimated at about 5,000, huddled in humid and warm conditions on Plaza Hernandez, fronting the centuries-old Santo Nino Church. Speaking almost exclusively in Tagalog, Estrada said, "My belief is strong that together, we can get out of these depths and stand up against the trials because our belief in God is very strong."

He related that during his incarceration, he was allegedly "flooded with lies, and unfounded and erroneous charges from politicians who are hungry - not in the stomach - but hungry for power and wealth."

Estrada was incarcerated - more of a house arrest, really, as he was detained in a prison that allowed him some movement and freedom to communicate. "I was imprisoned for six years and four months, taken away from my family, my friends, and most of all, from the citizens. Throughout all these, I followed all the requirements of the law, even if they were painful. I let them have their wishes," Estrada added.

He promised to do everything in order to help the Filipino masses who are suffering under the present regime, adding that "today, our country is down; our economy is down, and we are experiencing the worst hunger in the history of the nation."

"I did not say this," he quipped, "the Social Weather Station (SWS) did." Estrada lamented that agriculture is down and the Philippines had become the big-

gest importer of rice in the world. "We are strengthening the farmers of Vietnam and Thailand instead of our own farmers." In June, in another SWS survey, 50 per cent of Filipino families have admitted that they are experiencing hardships.

To make things worse, the nation's indebtedness to international lending institutions keeps adding up and will reach more than two trillion pesos and may breach four trillion pesos mark when 2010 rolls around.

Talking about the bright spots in his administration, Estrada crowed about making Mindanao the "bread basket" of the nation, but he charged that the present administration is allegedly delivering the island to a minority, piece by piece. "Hundreds of thousands of people (in Mindanao) have lost their homes; thousands have perished in the conflict with MILF separatists; and hundreds of soldiers have been ambushed, some of them beheaded; and women have been raped; reporters and priests have been kidnapped. Can we still allow these?"

He said that, as commander-in-chief, he would not allow the division of Mindanao, adding that the nation must unite under one flag, one armed force, one government, and one Republic of the Philippines.

VP bet, Mayor Jejomar "Obama" Binay, the award-winning mayor of Makati City, touted the successful and much-envied social programs in his city, but he did not offer specifics on how to replicate them on

a nationwide scale. He is widely respected for his total and unconditional loyalty to Estrada. "Hindi ako nang-iwan (I don't leave anyone behind), Binay declared. "I never left Erap during the last eight years."

The Makati City executive offered two solutions to the citizens' sufferings: raising the majority of Filipinos from their depths of sufferings; and making sure that government will faithfully serve all the citizens. "Because of the urgency of the challenges that we face, are we ready to entrust the leadership of our government to people that are not ready and are not experienced?" he asked. "Are we going to take chances with 'impostors' who are peddling ideas to alleviate the sufferings of the poor?"

Paying homage to Estrada, Binay said that he wished for the arrival of a new president who will have remedies for the nation's problems. "Erap will not be unfeeling and numb to the sufferings of the nation; and he will not use public funds for his personal advantage."

With five aspirants having already indicated their firm intentions to run for the highest office, the results of the 2010 presidential elections is still too wide open to call. But one thing is for sure, with the opposition camp fielding four candidates, and with all the candidates at this point still unable to establish a clear and realistic theoretical lead over one another, the excitement of the 2010 presidential elections is just beginning. ■

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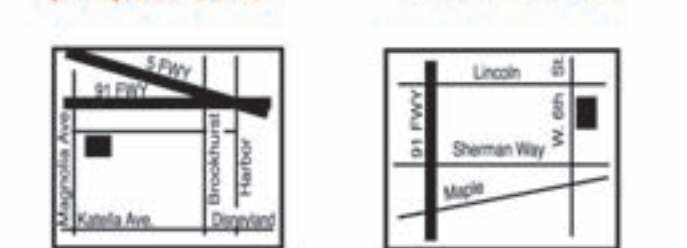


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## Asian Journal...

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## Union: Firm...

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Tuesday, follows similar ones the union's state affiliate filed last month with Louisiana officials.

The union says California-based Universal Placement International and its president, Lourdes "Lulu" Navarro, illegally collected the fees from teachers they recruited in the Philippines.

The union also claims the company holds the teachers' immigration documents to coerce payments.

A spokeswoman for Navarro did not immediately return a call for comment. (AP)

## CamSur Gov. LRay bolts...

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League of Municipalities president Nabua Mayor Ferdinand Simbulan, Vice-Mayors League president Nathaniel Capucan, and Councilors League president Antonio Olaño were among those who took oath. Also present were delegations from Catanduanes, Sorsogon, Masbate, and Camarines Norte.

NP stalwarts Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano and Albay Rep. Al Francis Bichara (2nd district), spokesmen former Reps. Gilbert Remulla, Juan Pablo "Rimpy" Bondoc, and Atty. Adel Tamano, and Col. Ariel Querubin's stepson and spokesman Jose Martin Loon attended the oath-taking rites.

Villafuerte is credited for making Camarines Sur as the undisputed most favored tourist destination in the country today, with tourist arrivals reaching 902,202 in the first six months of the year, according to the Department of Tourism report.

Camarines Sur, the largest province in the Bicol region, has a voting population of over one million. It is Bicol's no. 1 and 10th placer in terms of net income as certified by the Commission on Audit 2008 report for the fiscal year 2007 as submitted by 80 provinces. ■

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