

JDV: Erap still loved by masses

by EVA VISPERAS
Philstar.com



Former Pres. Joseph Estrada

CALASIAO, Pangasinan—Once presidential rivals but now, no less than Pangasinan fourth district Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. said former President Joseph Estrada who defeated him in the 1998 elections is still loved by the masses.

De Venecia told *The Star* last April 27 when he came here for the inauguration of a technical-vocational school that “many lower middle class and the AB groups of Philippine society are strongly committed to Erap.”

“I have seen it myself. He is still loved by the masses. Erap is still quite strong especially among the masses of the people,” De Venecia, who lost to Estrada in the 1998 presidential polls, said.

He said about two weeks ago, Estrada invited him and his wife Gina to go around with him in Metro Manila during his sorties and he saw how strong he remains.

“The pro-Erap sentiment is still quite strong,” he said.

He said Estrada is still loved as a leader of the opposition, adding that he thinks the former President who is being reported to run anew in the 2010 elections for president, “can help unite the diverse groups within the opposition.”

De Venecia recalled that it took almost 30 days before then Presi-

dent Fidel Ramos was proclaimed by Congress as president. The same was true for President Arroyo, he said. But when he was the speaker of the House even if he lost to Estrada, he proclaimed him within one day because he wanted to set an example in Philippine democracy.

Moreover, De Venecia said there will be a large scale exodus of Lakas party members in September or October.

Lakas will be dismembered but after President Arroyo exits in 2010, the party will reunite, he said.

He said many had signified to him their plan to leave the party, adding that “to stay with GMA is a kiss of death.”

De Venecia said for 2010, what will most likely happen is that the smaller political parties and the larger opposition parties will coalesce into a powerful anti-GMA coalition that will ensure the victory of the opposition in the coming election. ■

Daniel Smith may still be in RP, on board USS Essex'

by BEBOT SISON
Inquirer.com

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—US Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, who has reportedly left the country last April 24 following his acquittal by the Court of Appeals (CA), may still be in the country aboard USS Essex (LHD2), his mother ship which remains docked at Alava Pier in this free port for the annual US-RP Balikatan exercises.

The US Embassy in Manila, where Smith was detained prior to his acquittal, announced in a statement released last April 25 that Smith has left the Philippines “under the authority of the United States military officials.”

However, it was not known exactly how Smith left the country and there were no reports that he has taken a commercial or special flight from any of the airports, including the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) and the Subic Bay International Airport.

Even Air Force spokesman Maj. Gen. Gerardo Zamudio has

confirmed that there was no US military aircraft that took off from Subic or Villamor Air Base after Smith was ordered released from US custody.

“This leaves a big possibility that Smith might actually be leaving with his mother ship,” a source at the Port of Subic told *The Star*.

“Most likely, Smith was flown out of the US embassy by helicopter and then brought to USS Essex,” the source added.

The Essex, which deployed US marine contingents based at the US military facilities in Okinawa, Japan, first docked here on April 14 to bring Marines participating in this year’s Balikatan exercises.

It then left Subic on April 18, but returned to this port on April 24, a day after Smith was acquitted in Manila.

Other sources in the Subic seaport department said they have observed “unusually heightened security measures” at the Essex,

as well as its escort ships, after its return here.

The sources also noted that unlike in the past several years of the military exercise, this time sailors from the Essex were not allowed to go out of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

“Iba ang higit ngayon (The security precautions are more strictly enforced now),” a source said, adding that sometimes two or three military helicopters could be seen patrolling the area.

Sources theorized that the US embassy may have announced Smith’s departure to cover up the fact that he is still on the Essex, whose scheduled departure remains unannounced.

Seaport sources clarified that the schedule of arrival and departure for US military ships is not announced for security reasons.

Smith first arrived at Subic Bay via USS Essex (LHD) in October 2005 for a similar Balikatan exercise. (*Inquirer.net*)

Miriam: Visiting Forces Agreement...

PAGE A7 ◀ given four-year contracts and afterwards given the option to leave or continue their tours of duty.

Many join the service to get scholarships and other benefits, he added.

Justiniano said he did not even get a chance to say goodbye or talk with Smith before he flew to the US. However, Smith sent an email to lawyer Joan de Venecia to express his “appreciation for the work of his lawyers,” he added.

Justiniano said he is not hurt by the personal attacks that he defended an accused rapist of a Filipina.

“It is the job of the lawyer to handle a case irrespective of race, nationality, religion, and social standing of his client,” he said. “I’m just doing my job, nothing personal, that’s the way I handle my cases. I don’t harbor any ill feelings towards my opponents.”

“If you’re carried away by your emotions, you will not be doing a good job, you have to be objective.”

Justiniano is preparing to go to the US to relax and watch Manny Pacquiao’s fight with Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas.

He bought a ticket for the big

event at the MGM Grand on May 2 for \$600, he added.

Asked if he would like to join Pacquiao’s legal team, he said: “I would be honored.” ■

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Crispin Caday Lozano, Esq.
Graduated Juris Doctor from Western State University in Fullerton, CA. He is a CPA, and a BBA Cum Laude and an active member of the State Bar of California. All legal services are performed under the supervision of an active member of the State Bar of California.

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