

De Castro top administration bet—Palace

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
Inquirer.net

VICE President Noli De Castro is still the administration's top choice for its standard-bearer in the 2010 presidential election, a Malaca-

ñang official said.

Gabriel Claudio, presidential political adviser, described as "highly speculative" the report that De Castro could end up join-

ing another political party outside the administration coalition for his presidential bid.

"Definitely not—he's still on top of the shortlist of presidential materials by the administration coalition," he said.

"The report is typical of political armchair analysis and barbershop talk," he said.

Tony Gatmaitan, executive director of the Political Economic Applied Research (PEAR), announced Saturday, May 10 that a "new party" to be launched next month could carry De Castro's candidacy.

Claudio said he was convinced that De Castro would "prefer running under the administration coalition than with any other group or under any other scenario once he is ready to take the plunge."

"Any suggestion to the contrary is speculative and smacks of intrigue," he said.

Claudio described as "in the bag, a done deal" the ongoing effort to merge the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and the Kabalikang Malayang Pilipino (Kampi, Partner of the Free Filipino) for the 2010 elections.

In fact, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would preside over the meeting of the two parties'

executive committees before the end of the month, said Claudio, also the chair of the unification committee for the merger.

Claudio said the merger's choice for standard-bearer would be "internally known by July at the latest." He said the public announcement would come in August.

He said the administration was eyeing De Castro because his "clean record as a public official and his mass appeal are clearly established." He also cited De Castro's experience as senator and now vice president and his consistently strong showing in surveys.

"The reasons for his desirability are quite obvious," he said.

Claudio said the administration was not rushing De Castro into a decision.

"The invitation stands," he said. "We're giving him the latitude to calibrate his own response. His political intuition and sense of timing have served him well."



Vice President Noli De Castro

Besides De Castro, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro was also in the administration's shortlist, he said. But he said Teodoro's chances would still depend on how well he would fare in surveys since he announced his bid more than two months ago.

Claudio declined to identify the third aspirant in the shortlist. But he hastened to add that Bayani Fernando, chair of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, was still "in contention." ■

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Teodoro 'not afraid' to be McCain in 2010

DEFENSE Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. said he was "not afraid" to suffer the same fate as former US presidential candidate John McCain, whose loss was attributed

to, among others, his association with a widely unpopular incumbent.

Teodoro is seeking the anointment of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whose popularity has dipped to record lows, according to opinion surveys, due to allegations of massive corruption and election fraud.

McCain was the standard bearer of former US president George W. Bush's Republican Party. He lost to the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama.

Arroyo was a staunch ally of Bush, who was widely criticized for the US-led invasion of Iraq, and a losing war in Afghanistan.

"I'm not afraid to be John McCain," Teodoro told a news forum of presidential aspirants organized by cable television network ANC.

Teodoro cited the many "benefits" that the country reaped from the close to nine-year Arroyo presidency.

"Despite the global downturn, the country reached 7.3-percent gross domestic product growth in 2007 and has one of the lowest unemployment and inflation



Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr.

rates," he said.

Also in 2007, Teodoro said the Philippines posted the "lowest deficit in history."

In the area of national security, which he said was his "expertise," Teodoro said the government was applying a "balanced approach" against threat groups to avoid a "shooting war."

He said the Arroyo government also constructed the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX) and the Roll-on, Roll-off (Ro-Ro) network, which he said was vital in delivering relief goods to typhoon provinces in the Visayas in 2008.

"These are but of a few of the positive benefits that the country has gathered from the Arroyo administration," he said. (Inquirer.net)

AFTER GETTING EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY

13 Ninoy Aquino convicts seek absolute pardon

by TETCH TORRES
Inquirer.net

FORMER soldiers and officers convicted for the death of Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. want the executive clemency granted them to be upgraded to absolute pardon.

"We want to live and work again like ordinary citizens in our country," the soldiers said in their letter to Bureau of Pardons and Parole executive director Reynaldo Bayang, whose recommendation to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo they are seeking.

Making the request through their lawyer, Public Attorney's Chief Persida Acosta, are: Master Sergeant Pablo Martinez; Sergeants Arnulfo Artates, Ruben Aquino, Rolando De Guzman, Rodolfo Deslong, Arnulfo De Mesa, Ernesto Mateo, Felomino Miranda, Rogelio Moreno, and Felizardo Taran; Technical Sergeant Claro Lat; First Lieutenant Jesus Castro; and Captain Romeo Bautista.

"We would like to request for your Honor's assistance in connection with the commutation of sentence that was given to each one of us, for it to be amended and upgraded to absolute pardon so that our civil and political rights could be restored," their letter read.

Once an absolute pardon is granted, they will be able to vote, claim their retirement benefits being members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, be able to work, acquire property under their name, among others.

"Since before our incarceration, we were all employed in the military service. We would like to serve the public once again by joining the government." ■

More senators question 'book blockade'

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

SENATORS questioned last May 13 the Bureau of Customs' (BOC) "book blockade," saying it could do more harm than good even if it intends to raise more revenues.

Senators Edgardo Angara, Manuel Roxas II and Richard Gordon joined Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago in questioning the BOC's move to impose taxes on imported books.

They said the government must promote reading and make it a part of every Filipino's lifestyle rather than make books more inaccessible.

Angara said reading and publishing must flourish in the country. "Books play an integral part in a country's intellectual, technical and cultural development. They are the most effective and economical tools for achieving educational growth, imparting information and recording, preserving, and disseminating the nation's cultural heritage. Unfortunately, only few of the books in our libraries and bookstores are local publications," Angara said.

The Philippines has the lowest output of book titles compared to neighbors in Southeast Asia. Statistics released by the Philippine National Library showed that the number of books published since 2000 averages 5,326.5 a year.

Roxas asked Finance Secretary Margarito Teves to explain the new BOC policy, which has sparked complaints from book importers and sellers. ■

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