

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## Party merger gets FVR blessing

by PAOLO ROMERO  
Philstar.com



Former Pres. Fidel V. Ramos

ALL'S well that ends well—according to Malacañang.

After nearly four hours of chatting and “reminiscing” over a bottle of cognac and mixed nuts with two top Palace officials, former President Fidel Ramos finally gave his blessings—with conditions—to the merger of President Arroyo’s Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) and the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD), which he founded in 1992.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio visited Ramos at his home in Ayala Alabang last May 30 to secure the former leader’s support for the merger that he slammed a day after Mrs. Arroyo formally launched the Lakas-Kampi-CMD last May 28.

Mrs. Arroyo now chairs the merged party.

“He (Ramos) extended his congratulations for the conclusion of the merger,” Claudio said. “FVR expressed no objections or reservations whatsoever about his assumption as chairman emeritus of the merged party as unanimously endorsed and

approved by all its members.”

He described the meeting, which began at 5pm and ended at almost 9pm, as “very cordial, jovial but substantial.”

“In the process, we finished one bottle of Hennessy XO,” Claudio said.

Ermita said the former leader was just wearing a polo shirt and shorts during their meeting at his library.

“He (Ramos) was in high spirits and he called us ‘good-looking guys’ so I knew he would be receptive to our explanations,” Ermita said in a telephone interview.

The executive secretary said he carried with him a message from the President, who is currently in South Korea for an official visit, that the merger was done in accordance with bylaws of Lakas.

After the meeting, the former leader saw them off at his driveway. Claudio said that aside from the merger, they talked about various issues, including the economy, the bureaucracy, the aspiring presidential candidates in the administration and the opposition as well as economic matters and foreign affairs.

Ramos also pointed out that it was Lakas that rallied behind Mrs. Arroyo during her political crisis in 2005 where the so-called “Hyatt 10” Cabinet officials resigned and called for her resignation.

Claudio clarified that there was no rush or “undue haste” as Ramos described the merger process and that the former leader was given regular updates by the organizers.

“I apologized (to Ramos) for some coordinative lapses, owing mostly to President Ramos being abroad for two weeks immediately preceding the merger convention,” he said, adding there was a rush in the “caucuses and other preparations” for the merger.

Ramos pushed for amendments of the constitution and bylaws of the new party that would be helped by more consultations among members even after the merger.

The amendments should include explicit provisions on Lakas-Kampi-CMD’s links with international groups, particularly the Centrist Democrats International (CDI).

The former president also said that the constitution and bylaws should be more detailed on the “pooling of resources” of the two parties, and be reflective of the ideology and traditions of Lakas and Kampi, Claudio said.

He said that upon Ramos’ instructions, the merged party would immediately inform the CDI leadership, now based in Madrid, of the merger.

“I assured him that (amendments) that would not be a problem,” Claudio said.

He said he already informed Mrs. Arroyo of the details of the meeting, adding that there are no scheduled talks yet between the President and Ramos but the two leaders are expected to meet during the meeting of the national executive committee of the Lakas-Kampi-CMD later this month where the amendments to the constitution and bylaws would be hammered out. ■

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## Bayani Fernando hits favoritism in presidential bets selection in Lakas-Kampi

by HELEN FLORES  
Philstar.com

METRO Manila Development Authority Chairman Bayani Fernando claimed last June 1 that there was apparent favoritism by some party leaders in selecting the administration presidential candidate in the newly merged Lakas-Kampi-CMD.



MMDA Chairman Bayani Fernando

Fernando, Lakas vice president for the National Capital Region, vowed to push through with his run for president even if he would not be chosen as administration standard-bearer in the May 2010 elections.

“I am continuing. I am not stopping. For more than a year now since I signified my intention of running I am still as eager. I’m in the race. As I have said, I am decided, determined, focused,” Fernando told reporters at the Manila Hotel.

“I’m not against the merger (of Lakas-CMD and Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino or Kampi). I’m against the way some officers of the party are playing favorites among the probable (presidential candidates) which can be so unfair,” Fernando said, without naming names.

Among those being considered to be the administration’s presidential candidates are Vice President Noli de Castro and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro.

“It actually affects the relationship in the party. But I’m not bolting the party, as I said I am for the merger,” Fernando said.

He was a no-show at the merger ceremony last May 28 at the Manila Hotel.

Asked if he would support the presidential bet to be picked by the party, Fernando said: “I have been asked that question ever since, and I don’t know, I reserve my answer to that. It could depend on the circumstance.”

Although he announced his intention to run for president as early as September 2008, he has been unable to improve his rankings in the surveys, with his highest popularity rating at only two percent.

In the latest Pulse Asia survey on presidentiables, Fernando received 0.3 percent of votes of the 1,200 Filipino adults surveyed.

A few days after its merger, the new party Lakas-Kampi-CMD is drafting a platform of government that would economically empower the people and continue the reform agenda of the administration amid the global recession.

“Our work in this new merged party is to prove to the people that the reform programs implemented by the government under President Arroyo are correct and are now helping insulate us from the global recession,” said Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, who is seeking the nomination of Lakas-Kampi-CMD as its vice-presidential bet in the 2010 elections.

Puno said the party would also have to mount a massive information drive to inform the people of the proper, albeit tough, reforms put in place by Mrs. Arroyo that are responsible for the sustained growth of the domestic economy, which is now shielding Filipinos from the worst effects of the global financial crisis. ■