

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Lakas-Kampi gives De Castro, Teodoro...

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a major role in selecting the administration's presidential candidate. According to Claudio, the Lakas-Kampi-CMD will have a "very clear and open brainstorming session on the process by which we have to come up with final candidates of the party for national positions, specifically for president, vice president, and senators." "We gave ourselves up to July 31 to come up with a first draft of the criteria for the selection process," Ermita said after presiding over the first meeting of the party's national directorate in Quezon City last June 24 before the news conference. Claudio said the party would meet on July 31 to discuss the parameters of the procedure to draw up a list

of possible presidential candidates. "This means) the short list of the candidates that will finally be considered by the party for official nomination," he explained. Ermita, on the other hand, revealed an agreement was made during the three-hour meeting that only party members would be considered for national candidates. Ermita also rallied members of the new political alliance to begin consolidating their political network in the effort to come out with a single political slate. He also said former President Fidel Ramos would continue to be the party's chairman emeritus under the new constitution and by-laws.

While the party has yet to choose its presidential candidates, Puno announced his intention to run as vice presidential candidate for next year's elections.

Both party officials were careful not to suggest the possibility of choosing Vice President Noli de Castro or Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro as possible candidates, since both are not yet members of the party.

Ermita refused to mention De Castro and Teodoro but stressed they would welcome new members "to widen the selection process."

"I don't want to talk specifically of the Vice President. In the first place, while he is not a member of the party, he is a member of the Cabinet and out of respect for him, the good Vice President would know what move he has to take now we have these developments," he said. Ermita, however, disclosed efforts of some party members to convince De Castro to join.

The only Lakas-Kampi-CMD member who has long expressed his desire to run for president is Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chairman Bayani Fernando. ■

Can Estrada run again?

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Malacañang officials have long insisted that the Constitution bars a former President from seeking a second term.

They continue to do so, with Justice Secretary Agnes Devanadera telling reporters in Zamboanga City earlier on Tuesday that Estrada was no longer qualified to seek the presidency.

"Pursuant to the provisions of our Constitution, anybody elected as President can no longer run for such a position," she said.

Devanadera said what she said of Estrada could also be said of Ms Arroyo: "For as long as you have been elected President, you are no longer qualified to [seek] the same position."

Other offices are "not covered by these prohibitions, only the position of President," she said.

"I have no knowledge of that," she said, adding that she had only read of Ms Arroyo's purported planned run in the newspapers.

Good for another try
Estrada's legal eagles claim

that he can take another stab at the presidency because he served less than half of his six-year term.

The man himself said as much on the sidelines of the general membership meeting of the Philippine Constitutional Association (Philconsa) on Tuesday, June 23 at the Manila Hotel.

"Two-and-a-half years is not enough to finish my projects," he said in an ambush interview.

Estrada pointed out that in 2004, Ms Arroyo's legal advisers insisted that she could run for President because she had merely completed his unfinished term of three-and-a-half years.

Estrada to slide down
"Her advisers said that if the term is less than four years, she can still run since she only had three-and-a-half years as President. I only had two-and-a-half," he said.

Estrada said this did not mean that he had decided to seek a new term. He said he was still in the process of "feeling the pulse of the people."

Should there be a clamor for him to run anew, he said, "how can I say no to the people?"

But should his consultations show that he is "not winnable," he said, he would run for vice president.

"Remember that in 1992, I ran for president but eventually slid down to the vice presidency. Who knows? I am going around and feeling the pulse. If [it is shown] that I am not winnable, I will slide down," he said.

No way for GMA
Commenting on Ms Arroyo's purported planned run for a seat in the House representing her home province of Pampanga, law dean Amado Valdez, Philconsa vice president for academic affairs, said she was constitutionally barred from doing so during her incumbency.

But should Ms Arroyo insist on seeking a congressional seat, Valdez suggested that she take a terminal leave of absence as a legal option.

"The awesome functions and privileges of an incumbent President carry... inherent and built-in legal and moral limitations to seek another political office," Valdez said. ■



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