

# Romulo favors Aquino

But Malacañang tells execs: 'Toe the line'

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA & LEILA SALAVERRIA  
Inquirer.net



**HOT SEAT** He may be President Macapagal-Arroyo's right hand man on diplomacy, but Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, seated beside her at a meeting with Filipinos in Saudi Arabia, indicated his heart belongs to Noynoy Aquino. *Malacañang photo*

MALACAÑANG on Sept. 21 served notice to its troops to "toe the line" after Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo—one of its most senior Cabinet officials—broadly indicated his support for Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, the Liberal Party's standard-bearer in the 2010 presidential election.

News that Romulo was favoring the senator came the same day that another administration official—Commissioner Jaime Jacob of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC)—announced he was resigning his post in order to support the presidential bid of the late former President Corazon Aquino's only son.

Jacob's resignation was the latest sign of cracks in the facade of administration unity and came just two months before the official start of the campaign for the May 2010 national elections.

Romulo was in London accompanying no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself in her three-nation foreign trip when he indicated in an interview.

"In 2007, I voted for Noynoy Aquino [for senator], so my ties with the Aquino family have been deep and lasting," Romulo said in the interview. "I've always been with Tita Cory and voted for the Aquinos."

Asked if he would support Noynoy, Romulo answered: "I have voted for the Aquinos all the time."

**Boss wouldn't comment**  
Romulo declined comment when he arrived with Ms Arroyo in Saudi Arabia.

"Per boss, no further comment," a Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) spokesperson said in a text message to the *Inquirer*, which had asked to talk with the foreign secretary.

Romulo was budget secretary in Cory Aquino's Cabinet and, like the Aquinos, is a Tarlakeno.

Malacañang tried to appear unflustered by the report.

**It's a must**

But Anthony Golez, deputy presidential spokesperson, made it clear that members of Ms Arroyo's Cabinet would eventually have to declare their unequivocal support behind the administration's presidential candidate once the choice became "official."

"Definitely, when this adminis-

tration officially supports a candidate, everybody must toe the line," Golez said in a media briefing.

Gabriel Claudio, presidential adviser on political affairs, described Romulo's declaration as a "curious case."

"It will have to be carefully discussed and clarified," he said.

Claudio declined to comment on the possible impact of Romulo's declaration on the united front the administration is trying to project behind its presidential candidate.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Te-

odoro emerged as the Lakas-Kampi-CMD's candidate by "consensus" during a meeting of the group's 65-member national executive committee last week.

Teodoro and Aquino are cousins.

**De Venecia fallout**

Administration unity has come under severe test, if it has not been actually dented, since last year following the ruling coalition's decision to oust Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia as Speaker.

De Venecia has since been a top critic of Ms Arroyo. ■

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