

GMA to preside over Lakas-Kampi merger

President Arroyo will preside tomorrow over the historic merger of Lakas-CMD and Kampi – the two most powerful political parties in the country – that will give birth to a political powerhouse likely to dominate the 2010 elections.

Raymundo Roquero, executive director of Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD), said political leaders across the country, among them former President Fidel Ramos, Speaker Prospero Nograles of Lakas and Kampi political kingpins led by Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, will participate in the historic affair.

The merger, impossible until 45 days ago, marks a major realignment of forces that will give the administration a decisive edge in next year's battle for the presidency and control of both chambers of Congress.

Roquero, in a press statement, said the merger of Lakas-CMD

By PERSEUS ECHEMINADA

and Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) is more than a political marriage of convenience.

"We are a party of principles and ideology. And we are proud of Lakas-Kampi's program of government, because the bottom line is politics must serve the people and articulate the national aspiration, not personal ambition and quest for power," he said.

Roquero said the record "undeniably proves that Lakas-Kampi's program of government has succeeded in lifting the Philippine economy to record growths and in keeping the country relatively stable despite the global financial crisis."

Also expected at the merger ceremony are the parties' fifty-plus governors, as well as senators and congressmen, city and municipal mayors and party elders.

Former party heads, Speaker Nograles-Lakas president, and Secretary Puno, Kampi chairman,

will deliver their remarks.

"Politics is won at the local level, herein lies the real strength of Lakas-Kampi. At the local level, it is unmatched in numerical and organizational resources, and in certain major areas, it faces no worthy challenge by the opposition," Roquero said.

Once the merger is formalized, Roquero said the party will buckle down to serious work and start mobilizing its nationwide organization to ensure the administration victory in the 2010 elections.

Puno for veep

Meanwhile, Puno announced yesterday his plan to run as the administration's vice presidential candidate in the 2010 elections.

The DILG chief, however, clarified that his political plans will still depend on the decision of the would-be unified Lakas-Kampi.

"I am going to seek the nod and the approval of the joint Lakas-Kampi nomination for vice presi-



Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino chairman and Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno (second from left) is endorsed by Representatives Amelita Villarosa, Rodolfo Antonino and Jose Solis as the party's official candidate for vice president in 2010 after a meeting yesterday.

dent if and when the party shall finally have its major convention," said Puno.

Aside from Puno, opposition Sen. Francis Pangilinan has also announced his plan to run for the vice presidency.

While Pangilinan has an edge in popularity being the husband of mega star Sharon Cuneta, Puno has been visible nationwide during consultative meetings with local government officials as DILG secretary.

Puno's political plans, announced during the National Council of the Kampi, received overwhelming support, prompting Rep. Rodolfo Antonino to call for a vote of acclamation.

Puno said he would submit himself to the nomination process and would support whoever is chosen as its vice-presidential candidate "but I will work very hard to get the nomination." – With Cecilie Suerte Felipe, Paolo Romero