

# 'GMA quitting Lakas for Gibo'

By DING CERVANTES

**CLARK FREEPORT, Pampanga** – President Arroyo is reportedly planning to resign as president of the merged Lakas-Kampi-CMD party to boost the presidential bid of administration candidate Gilberto Teodoro Jr.

Pampanga first district Rep. Carmelo Lazatin told **The STAR** that the President revealed her intention during a closed-door meeting held at the Fontana Convention Center here the other day.

Present at the meeting were Lazatin, Malacañang External Affairs Secretary Edgardo Pamintuan and Mabalacat Mayor Marino Morales.

"She said she felt she was not contributing positively to the candidacy of Teodoro so it would be better for her to resign and give way to younger leaders," Lazatin said.

The meeting lasted about an hour and occurred after the opening of the three-day 2nd National Information and Communication Technology Confederation of the Philippines at Fontana, where the President was guest speaker.

Lazatin said Pamintuan and Morales tried to dissuade the President from resigning as party president but they appeared to have failed.

"I am prepared to respect and support whatever the decision of the President is," he said.

Lazatin said Mrs. Arroyo

Turn to Page 10

lamented the negative attitude of the media towards her, which she thought was adversely affecting the chances of Teodoro in the presidential elections.

"She said she wanted younger leaders to take over (the Lakas-Kampi-CMD)," he said.

While the President did not mention who she wanted to take over her post as party president, Lazatin said he believed it would be former Rep. Prospero Pichay, now head of the Local Water Utilities Administration.

Pichay has been frequently accompanying the President in her numerous sorties in Pangasinana.

There were reports that the Lakas-Kampi-CMD executive committee will meet on Nov. 11 instead of Nov. 19, as initially scheduled, to enable the President to announce her decision to relinquish the party presidency.

Lazatin, however, said that Mrs. Arroyo will remain with the merged party as an ordinary member.

He said the President's reported political plans were never discussed in the meeting although he admitted that some months ago some of his colleagues in Congress were mapping out plans for Mrs. Arroyo to run for Congress and later install her as prime minister once Charter change realizes a parliamentary system of government.

## Macalintal: Let's wait and see

Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez, however, suggested on Thursday that Mrs. Arroyo run for vice president in 2010 to push for "fiscal reforms and crucial

legislation."

Suarez said Arroyo would be an "asset" to anyone who would become president.

But the President's rumored political plans could be finally confirmed or debunked on Dec. 1, the last day of the filing of certificates of candidacy, her election lawyer said yesterday. Romulo Macalintal, in a news briefing at the Palace, stressed that Mrs. Arroyo has not given any inkling of her possible political plans.

"We know that Dec. 1 is the deadline (of the filing of the certificates of candidacy) so people will know by Dec. 1 whether she will run or not," he said.

"The people will not be surprised anymore if she will run so I think let's wait for the situation to unfold," Macalintal said in Filipino.

Anticipating questions on the issue of her naming for vice president, Macalintal said: "The issue of her being a congresswoman has not yet been resolved, the more I can't answer whether she is going to run for vice president."

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said Macalintal was designated to answer questions on the President's possible future political plans from now on.

In the past, Palace spokespersons answered such queries from journalists.

"It's not that she's undecided, but it has not entered her mind whether she'll be running or would be running in the forthcoming political exercise," Macalintal said.

"There is no legal obstacle if in case Mrs. Arroyo decides to seek public office again," he added.

The President's allies said

she is only barred from seeking re-election under the Constitution.

Macalintal said before the issue of whether Mrs. Arroyo will run or not, the legal qualifications of other prospective political candidates should be first resolved.

"She told me that she has not said anything about running but these are all opinions of some critics."

He noted that there is a petition before the Supreme Court, which appears to be directed against Mrs. Arroyo, though she is not a respondent.

Macalintal was referring to the petition earlier filed by Henry Giron, head of the Article 64 Movement, asking the Supreme Court to stop the Commission on Elections from implementing a resolution that would allow the President to run for Congress without resigning from office.

Giron said the possibility of Mrs. Arroyo running for Congress was among the considerations in their petition. The Comelec rebutted the petition. Macalintal said Mrs. Arroyo is an astute politician, and therefore is aware of the political dynamics in the country.

He said elected officials, whose terms are about to end are often subject of speculations and "the President is not exempt from all these speculations."

## Teodoro-Revilla tandem in the works

Meanwhile, a faction from the ruling party was reportedly working for a Teodoro-Legarda tandem, according to a top party official.

Raymundo Roquero, Lakas-Kampi deputy secretary-general, told reporters during the weekly Friday *Boletin* that talks are now ongoing for a possible

alliance-Kampi-NPC coalition. "If the coalition will materialize then NPC will not field any candidate and will adopt Teodoro as its presidential bet" he said.

But Roquero said governors, town mayors and top party members are pushing for a Gibo-Bong Revilla tandem which will be considered during the party executive committee meeting next week.

"Top Local executives belonging to the administration party picked Sen. Revilla as the running mate of Gibo," he said.

He added that the ruling party is set to declare Teodoro and possibly the vice presidential candidate during a national convention set at the Philippine International Convention Center on Nov. 19.

Roquero said local chief executives find Revilla with strong party loyalty and solid political base in Cavite, Rizal province and Nueva Ecija.

Revilla is the brother-in-law of Rizal Gov. Junjun Ynares and his namesake and father, former senator Ramon Revilla Sr., hails from Nueva Ecija, a vote rich province in Luzon.

"Revilla's political strength is real. It is his closeness to the LGLs that makes his tandem with Gibo a powerhouse" he said.

Another celebrity politician, Edu Manzano, is also in the party's shortlist of vice presidential candidates.

Roquero, however, ruled out Mrs. Arroyo as vice presidential candidate, saying this is not on the party's political agenda.

## All about power

But the opposition was uncomfortable with talks about Mrs. Arroyo's political plans.

Maikati City Mayor Jejomar Binay said the President spells

trouble for the next administration if she wins either as vice president or congressman and became House speaker.

"How can the next administration focus on addressing the problems which Mrs. Arroyo will leave behind when you could still have her plotting ways to remain in power?" Binay, president of the United Opposition (UNO) who will team up with former President Joseph Estrada, said.

"What the country needs is a vice president who won't plot behind the back of the president and would sincerely care for the poor. The next administration should not be distracted by attempts to grab power," he said.

Senators, on the other hand, sneered at suggestions Mrs. Arroyo may run for vice president after the end of her term in June of 2010, saying her running mate would suffer from her unpopularity.

"It's a formula for disaster if you ask me," Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said.

Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano said Mrs. Arroyo already got a lot of votes and need not become vice president.

"Isn't her presidency plagued with vices? That is stealing, cheating, and lying (cover-ups) so in a sense people are already used to an Arroyo vice presidency. It will be Teodoro that will be affected, it may keep politicians' support of the admin party intact and lead to massive use of government resources but getting popular support will go from very difficult to almost impossible," he said.

"Does Teodoro want to spend his precious time answering issues regarding the nine years of the Arroyos? Whatever way we look at it, it won't be good for the country," he added.

Cayetano's sister-senator,

said the proposal was quite "shocking."

But Sen. Francis Pangilinan doubts that Mrs. Arroyo would seek the vice presidency.

"Her approval ratings are in the negative. Public disenchantment over her leadership is widespread nationwide and cuts across all sectors. She will not risk running and losing. The stakes are too high and the risks are too great. Most likely she will seek a local post where she has better chances of winning," he said.

## Escudero: Power corrupts

Sen. Francis Escudero said Mrs. Arroyo for vice president was too much already.

"Why can't people turn their back on power? I guess the saying is true: power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," he said.

Liberal Party vice presidential aspirant and Sen. Manuel Roxas II said it would be easy to win against Mrs. Arroyo in case she runs because of the scandals that hounded her administration.

Roxas said it would be a battle between "good and evil."

Escudero said alliances or tandems for the 2010 elections must be based on platform and not on the strength of party machinery, personal popularity or financial capability.

Escudero, who is expected to announce his political plans before the Dec. 1 deadline for the filing of certificates of candidacy, has publicly declared that he is for a P125 wage increase and against labor contractualization. He has also called for abolition of the pork barrel and the repeal of the oil deregulation law. — With Jose Rodel Clapano, Perseus Echemandia, Aurea Calica, Paolo Romero