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Gloria's "Spruce Goose"

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., June 2 (PinoyGlobal) - President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's long-time dream of creating the largest political party since the time of Marcos was realized last May 28, 2009 with the merger of Lakas-CMD and Kampi under the new name of Lakas-Kampi CMD. The merger of Lakas-CMD, founded by former President Fidel V. Ramos and former Speaker Joe de Venecia, and Kampi, founded by Gloria, would indeed be a formidable political force that could dominate the 2010 elections; that is, if it doesn't break apart by its sheer weight.

This reminds me of Howard Hughes who built the biggest flying boat which critics called the "Spruce Goose." On its maiden test flight on November 2, 1947 with Hughes piloting it himself, the humongous airplane flew for only a mile at 70 feet above the water. Its mediocre performance forced Hughes to abandon the project.

Would the super sized Lakas-Kampi CMD become Gloria's vehicle to dominate the 2010 elections or could it be another "Spruce Goose"?

During her keynote address at Lakas-Kampi CMD kickoff at the Manila Hotel, Gloria told the cheering party members: "The emergence Lakas-Kampi CMD as one party is our finest weapon and perhaps our best guarantee for success in the 2010 elections." She also said, "I look upon the Lakas-Kampi CMD moving as one, fighting as one, as the instrument and vehicle for electing the best, most qualified and the worthiest leaders of our country." Indeed, by merging the two parties, it could become the most formidable political force since the late President Ferdinand Marcos' New Society Movement or Kilusang Bagong

Lipunan (KBL).

Formed in 1978 after the martial law ended, KBL was an "umbrella" of various political parties, notably the Nacionalista and Liberal parties, which supported Marcos in the newly established interim National Assembly or Batasang Pambansa. Later on, KBL was converted into a political party and became the ruling party of Marcos during his dictatorial reign. KBL's absolute control of the Batasang Pambansa has put an end to the two-party system. There was virtually no opposition to Marcos until his ouster during the People Power Revolution in 1986.

Did Gloria have KBL in mind when she pursued the merger of the two largest political parties, Lakas and Kampi, into one that would have absolute control of Congress? But why would Gloria do that when she is going to step down at the end of her term in June 2010? Is there a probability that she would want to be the country's "leader" in one capacity or another after the 2010 elections?

Or could it be that what Gloria had in mind was to use the Lakas-Kampi CMD -- described as a "powerhouse" party -- to pursue Charter change (Cha-Cha) this year to change the form of government to a parliamentary system? If that would be the case, what might be Gloria's new role come June 30, 2010?

It remains to be seen if Lakas-Kampi CMD would really be a "powerhouse" party. First of all, the two persons most likely to compete for the party's presidential nomination -- Vice President Noli De Castro and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro -- are not members of the party. They are both independents with no current political affiliation.

The only bona fide member is Bayani Fernando, Chairman of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority. However, he has been ignored by the party's leaders because he is not deemed winnable. With no winnable presidential candidates from its ranks, Lakas-Kampi CMD could hardly be described as "powerhouse." However, if there is one power behind it, it would be Gloria.

Gloria single-handedly put the merger together when she assumed direct control of both parties a few weeks ago when Speaker Prospero Nograles and Congressman Luis Villafuerte resigned as president of their respective parties, Lakas and Kampi, to give Gloria a free hand in the merger.

It is interesting to note that Villafuerte did not attend the Lakas-Kampi CMD's first meeting last May 28. He indicated that he was not going to join the new party and will remain independent. He said that the merger would not solve the party's problems which include rivalries between Kampi and Lakas candidates in local elections. Several Kampi stalwarts including Congressman Felix Alfelor, Villafuerte's ally, are not joining the new party.

As someone once said, "Politics is local." The local elections could become the Achilles' heel of Lakas-Kampi CMD. One of the rules adopted by the new party was the "equity of the incumbent." Since the merger dissolved two parties to create one mega party, the merger could lose a lot of good Lakas and Kampi members who are not incumbent office holders. For example, if an incumbent office holder is a Lakas member, he or she would benefit from the "equity of the incumbent," thus automatically becoming the new party's candidate. Meanwhile, a Kampi member who wants to challenge the incumbent Lakas member would not get the new party's support and would be forced to get the endorsement of an opposition party. It could work the same way if

the incumbent was a Kampi member and the challenger was a Lakas member.

Had the two parties not merged, local Lakas and Kampi candidates could run against each other with the support of their respective parties. And whoever wins would still be allied with Gloria.

But like Hughes' "Spruce Goose," the Lakas-Kampi CMD -- which some people call PALAKA, acronym for "Partido Lakas-Kampi" -- could meet the same fate as Hughes' "Spruce Goose." What "Spruce Goose" proved was: "bigger doesn't necessarily mean better."

Presumably, Gloria would know that, as a result of the merger, she would have a lot of problems trying to mend local rivalries between Lakas and Kampi members running in the 2010 elections. However, it would be a different story if there would be no elections in 2010. With no elections, the incumbent Lakas-Kampi CMD officeholders -- from top to bottom -- would truly enjoy the benefits of "equity of the incumbent" which could include an extension of their terms of office. But for "no election" to happen, the Lakas-Kampi CMD has to have absolute control of the House of Representatives. And the merger just made that a reality.

In the late hours of January 2, 2009, the House of Representatives -- by voice vote -- railroaded the controversial House Resolution 1109 which calls on the House of Representatives to convene into a Constituent Assembly (Con-Ass) to amend the 1987 constitution without Senate participation. The question is: Can the House convene Con-Ass without the Senate?

Finally, the long-awaited Cha-cha train is moving in earnest. Now, Gloria has her cake and can eat it too. Next train stop: Supreme Court.