

Cojuangco, Tolentino reach RP cycling agreement

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BY JOSEF T. RAMOS CORRESPONDENT ALMOST a year after dispute clouded Philippine cycling, Tagaytay City Mayor Abraham Tolentino and Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) President Jose Cojuangco have reportedly reached an agreement to unite the cycling community in the country at last. The move, which is expected to benefit thousand cyclists around the archipelago, may soon follow POC's recognition of Tolentino as the local cycling community's legitimate leader after both parties agreed to hold a unification qualifying race for the Asian Games.

"I already talked with Tolentino and the outcome was good," said Cojuangco, who admires Tolentino's cooperation to unite the cycling community for a better composition of national riders in the Guangzhou Games in November.

"It's really inspiring to all our cyclists that we're united now," he said.

Nineteen Asian Games-bound cyclists, led by Mercurio Ramos, Baler Ravina and Marites Bitbit, among others, have qualified in the recent unification race, held at the Amoranto Veleddrome in Quezon City and Tagaytay City.

Tolentino, the president of Integrated Cycling Federation of the Philippines, who is recognized by the Union Cycliste International (UCI), also thanked Cojuangco and POC spokesman Joey Romasanta for the positive development.

"This unification effort is not for individual interest but for all the cyclists here in the country," said Tolentino, who will issue licenses to all the qualified cyclists for the Asian Games slated on November 12 to 27.

A highly reliable source from the POC who requested anonymity said the truce in cycling is expected to pave Tolentino's recognition in the Olympic family since his the other cycling group has no current permanent leader.

Arnold Taberdo, who was ousted by the said renegade group, has reportedly joined Tolentino for the sake of unity of the Philippine cycling community.

The leadership row in Philippine cycling started in January 2009 when the POC did not honor Tolentino's election because of lack of POC observers during the exercise. The Olympic body instead recognized the other group though it had no UCI recognition.

Because of the dispute, 12 of the 13 cyclists of the country were barred from competing in the Laos Southeast Asian Games in December. Tolentino then only issued license to Bitbit since she is the only qualified to race but the latter did not enter the competition.