

GMA evil, 'yabang'? Blame neck problems

She is not evil; she just has neck problems.

Former high school classmates of President Arroyo at Assumption College rallied around her yesterday amid mounting calls for the Chief Executive to resign.

By **PAOLO ROMERO**

"Some people judge her as *yabang* (haughty), but she just has neck problems. She has a human side and she is deeply hurt by all this name-calling," said former classmate and now Tourism Assistant Secretary

Cynthia Carrion.

Carrion was one of the 20 batch 1964 high school classmates of the President who joined her at an 8:30 a.m. Mass at the Heroes' Hall in Malacañang.

Wearing a red pantsuit, the President also led a novena to the Blessed Sacrament. After the Mass, she greeted her classmates and Palace employees. Some of those who attended the Mass remarked that she

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looked "peaceful."

Carrion said "some people judge her too strongly when they really don't know her... and we know her well."

Another former classmate, Marilou Palma Varona, recalled that while they were giggling and kidding around in their teens, Mrs. Arroyo would be studying. "If we were reading comics, she would be reading *Time* magazine," Varona said.

The President graduated valedictorian in high school.

"I feel they're (detractors). I hope they will respect her," said Varona.

She added that Mrs. Arroyo would often seek her former classmates to help in charity work that she does not announce to the public.

President Arroyo is "deeply hurt"

by the name-calling of her detractors, her former classmates said.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said Mrs. Arroyo will not stoop down to the level of using foul language now resorted to by her detractors.

Former speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. reportedly called Mrs. Arroyo an "ingrate," while opposition Sen. Jamby Madrigal said she was a "*tiyanak* (demon-infant)."

Earlier, Senate witness Rodolfo Lozada Jr. claimed that Commission on Higher Education Chairman Romulo Neri called Mrs. Arroyo "evil" during a meeting with opposition senators last December. But Neri said he could not recall ever making the remark. Gina de Venecia, wife of the former speaker, also said she had heard Neri refer to Mrs. Arroyo as "evil."