

# *GMA quarantined at Asian Hospital*

President Arroyo cancelled her public engagements for the week, including a Cabinet meeting, and went on self-quarantine after returning from a 12-day, four-nation trip Monday night as a precautionary measure against the spread of the A(H1N1) virus, officials said yesterday.

Mrs. Arroyo left for Tokyo, Japan on June 17 for an offi-

cial visit and proceeded to Brazil for a state visit. She also made a private stop in Colombia. On her way back to Manila, she made a stopover in Hong Kong to meet with a business group and anti-corruption consultant Tony Kwok.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo was slated to check in at the Asian

Hospital in Muntinlupa City yesterday as "an example."

The President underwent a medical check-up at the same hospital prior to leaving for Tokyo. Officials said the visit was a "gynecological check-up."

"As to how long, it (quarantine) will not be the full 10 days as suggested by some, both

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malicious and well intentioned," Remonde said in a news briefing.

"(It quarantine) is advisable but not necessary. The quarantine can be done at home. In the case of the President, she will take the opportunity to have a check-up," he added.

During the briefing, Remonde received a call from the President, who confirmed that she was on self-quarantine.

The press secretary, however, could not say whether First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo, who joined the trip, would also go on self-quarantine.

He said the decision was made during the flight back from Hong Kong as he admitted that the move has also prompted intrigues and calls from her critics to go on self-quarantine.

"There was no debate. She just said, anyway it is encouraged to go on quarantine. And then there are intrigues so she said 'I'll go on quarantine so that I'll take the time for check-up.' That's how she made the decision," she said.

"That's the most difficult aspect of leadership, especially the presidency, because

there are so many voices. And oftentimes, voices are such that damned if you do and damned if you don't," he said.

Among the public engagements that the President cancelled were the Cabinet meeting yesterday and her trip to Iligan City today.

Some of the activities that required her appearance were delegated to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

Since her schedule was relatively light, that helped her in deciding, Remonde said.

He said the self-quarantine would not affect her official functions as she would do her paperwork in the hospital.

When asked why Mrs. Arroyo chose to quarantine herself in the hospital instead of at the Palace, he said: "Maybe just as well because I think the environment is different."

He said officials who joined her trip, including himself, would go on quarantine on a voluntary basis.

Remonde said he had a lot of work left in his office that he needed to go on duty immediately after arriving in Manila.

- Paolo Romero