

# GMA bent on going to Cory's wake

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo will simply ignore possible heckling from the crowd when she shows up at the wake of former President Corazon Aquino at the Manila Cathedral after returning from her shortened trip to the US, a Pal-

ace official said yesterday.

Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III, who had served in the Cabinet of Mrs. Aquino, said he got a taste of what could be awaiting Mrs. Arroyo at the wake.

He told reporters he was

warmly received by several members of the Aquino family when he went to the Manila Cathedral on Monday but got "dagger looks" from some people present. He declined to identify them.

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Palace officials have yet to confirm the details of Mrs. Arroyo's expected visit to the wake. Officials earlier announced the President had to cut short her US trip to allow her to pay her last respects to the late people power icon. The late president will be buried today beside her husband Benigno Aquino Jr. at the Manila Memorial Park in Parañaque.

Bello downplayed warnings from some opposition lawmakers that Mrs. Arroyo would not be welcome or could be booed if she appears at the wake.

Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Teodoro Casino said the President should expect to be jeered at and booed if she shows up at Mrs. Aquino's wake.

"She should be prepared to take jeers, boos and snide remarks because she has not been a good president," he said.

He said the Aquinos might welcome Mrs. Arroyo and be civil to her but the late president's supporters might heckle her.

"When we talk of a religious affair, a solemn activity, a final act of giving respect to a national treasure, I don't think it is fair to listen to politicians," Bello told a news briefing.

"I believe in the Filipino as a civilized human being and I know that they would not resort to an extreme expression, especially (at) a funeral and wake of a national treasure. I don't think they would be willing to spoil the situation," he said.

"When I go to a wake, I don't think of what people would think. My visit to the wake is to pay my respects, extend my sympathies and condolences and especially my prayers," he said.

He said Mrs. Arroyo was grateful for the support given

to her by Mrs. Aquino in the days leading to Jan. 20, 2001 when she was installed as president.

In New York, Mrs. Arroyo recalled her days under the administration of former Mrs. Aquino.

"She was a great woman and she presided over the most important historical event in our country in the last 100 years and that is the peaceful People Power revolution," Mrs. Arroyo said in an interview with CNBC business news anchor and reporter Maria Bartiromo.

Mrs. Arroyo was trade undersecretary during the Aquino administration.

She also told CNBC of the Philippines being cited as one of the countries with good gender equity, having had two female presidents within a span of 15 years.

### Eager but worried

Presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo said he had wanted to show up at the wake for the late President Corazon Aquino but was worried of the "anxiety" that his visit might cause her family.

"I'm thinking about it (visiting the wake). But if my presence will cause more anxiety to the family, I'd rather not attend. I understand the situation. I know they are in grief. I don't wish to add more grief to the family," Rep. Arroyo told reporters.

Mikey and Mrs. Aquino's youngest daughter Kris were classmates at the Ateneo. The two political families had a falling out after the late president called for Mrs. Arroyo's resignation when the "Hello, Garci" scandal broke out. Mrs. Aquino, despite her age and

health, had also taken part in many protest actions against the Arroyo administration.

"I have nothing to do with the political differences. I believe the two families (Aquino and Arroyo) will remain friends. I have high respect for the former president," the Pampanga congressman added.

"She is my godmother in the wedding. She is also the godmother of (Camarines Sur Rep. Diosdado) Dato (Arroyo) in kumpil (confirmation)," the young lawmaker revealed.

Mrs. Aquino's youngest daughter Kris and only son Sen. Benigno "Noy" Aquino III have said their family is not looking forward to the President's visit.

Malacañang officials have said the President is determined to visit Mrs. Aquino's wake upon her return from the United States this morning.

### Prayers from the Marcoses

Even Mrs. Aquino's arch foes, the Marcoses, said they have been offering prayers for the late president.

"My family joins our nation

in mourning the death of former President Aquino," said Rep. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos II.

"We would also like to convey our deepest and sincere condolences to the family and friends of Mrs. Aquino. May they find strength in this time of loss. We pray to God to grant the former president a peaceful rest," the Ilocos Norte congressman said.

"I can feel the pain, the loss of a loved one. So I am in prayer. If these two families reconciled, there will be a miracle for the Philippines," former first lady Imelda Marcos said.

"Let us now unite in prayers for Cory, the Filipino people and our country," she said.

### A good leader lost

"The nation, and perhaps the world, just lost a most cherished leader whose life was an epitome of sacrifice and love," declared Speaker Prospero Nograles.

"Former President Aquino's courage, honesty and humility gave hope and life, and inspired the Filipino to fight and win back freedom and democ-

rary — a legacy that will forever be engraved in the hearts of a grateful people," he said.

"During this excruciating moment, we share the pain and condole with the family of the former president. The whole nation cannot but feel a great loss of a God-fearing leader, a loving mother, and a simple and ordinary wife who did the extraordinary for others," he said.

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, who served as Budget undersecretary during Aquino's term, also expressed his condolences. "One facet of the character of her which to my mind stands out is her respect for and capacity to tolerate differing views and opposing partisan positions," he said.

"She respected my political persuasion and did not attempt to change it with the

budgetary support she had given to my district," he said.

Lagman recalled that Mrs. Aquino didn't even bother to persuade him to support the candidacy of Fidel Ramos, knowing fully well that he was a "diehard Ramon Mitra supporter," referring to the late former Speaker Ramon Mitra who ran against Ramos in 1992.

Mitra's son Palawan Rep. Abraham Mitra said "the streets of heaven are full of angels who are massing up people power-style to welcome their newest member."

"We are committed to live out her inspiration as the country's people power icon and continue to fight any move that would curtail democracy," said Mitra, a stalwart of Nationalist People's Coalition. — With Delon Porcalla, Jess Diaz