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Aquino government pays hospital bills of Marcos' mom

By JACK REED



MANILA, Phillipines -- The Aquino government has agreed to pay the mounting hospital bills of the 93-year-old mother of deposed President Ferdinand Marcos for 'humanitarian reasons,' officials said Sunday.

Dona Josefa Edralin Marcos, apparently unaware that her son fled the country almost a month ago after being ousted from power, has run up a bill of \$55,679 at the Philippine Heart Center, hospital director Esperanza Cabral said.

The woman has lived in the penthouse suite of the heart center, a 'pet project' of former first lady Imelda Marcos, for most of the last seven years, and celebrated her 93rd birthday there on Feb. 15. Cabral said Marcos' mother was in stable condition and suffers 'nothing that her age cannot explain.'

'I think that perhaps a lot of what happened has been kept from her,' Cabral said.

Cabral said Mrs. Marcos' suite is off limits to most hospital employees. The suite has a living room, dining room and bedroom, and there is a helicopter pad on the roof. Mrs. Marcos' security is provided by the Armed Forces.

In addition to his mother, Marcos' 67-year-old brother, Pacifico, an obstetrician, and his two sisters, Fortuna and Elizabeth, remained in the Philippines after he fled into exile Feb. 25.

A brief announcement Sunday from the Information Ministry said President Corazon Aquino's government 'has agreed to pay the hospital bills of Dona Josefa Edralin Marcos for humanitarian reasons.'

The announcement noted that a local newspaper columnist reported last week that Marcos' mother had 'no one to turn to as she spends the remaining days of her life.'

Imelda Marcos had been making periodic payments on the bill from her personal account, but no money has been received since the civilian-backed military rebellion last month toppled Marcos. Imelda Marcos' bank accounts in the Philippines have been frozen by the Aquino government.

The 250-bed hospital was formerly under the Ministry of Human Settlements headed by Imelda Marcos and was widely criticized for catering only to the rich.

'The image of the heart center over the past few years is not unfounded,' said Cabral, who was placed in charge of the center after Aquino took office. 'It was supposed to be a hospital for the poor, but it didn't receive the support at the time.'

In other developments Sunday, Aquino was given the Peace Award for Distinguished Service to Community and Country on Sunday from her alma mater, St. Scholasticas College.

In a brief speech, the president said she was 'frustrated I am unable to effect the improvements that I seek more quickly.'

'There is no antidote to frustration except huge doses of patience and the realistic understanding that what took 20 years to destroy cannot possibly be rebuilt in one month or even a year,' she said.

'In my first 100 days in office, what I hope to accomplish is to set forth directions towards political normalization and economic recovery while the government is trying to maintain the delivery of essential public services.'

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