

Breast, groin biopsy but no surgery for GMA - Palace

President Arroyo did not have any form of surgery but only a biopsy on two lumps discovered in her breast and near the groin, which were later found to be benign during tests at the Asian Hospital and Medical Center, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said yesterday.

Remonde issued the explanation following reports that Mrs. Arroyo had doctors repair leaking breast implants done in the 1980s and remove an inguinal cyst.

Mrs. Arroyo was "annoyed" by the reports that she made several phone calls to Remonde and later met with him and her gynecologist Dr. Ma. Theresa Tangkeko-Lopez at the Palace to explain what happened during her two-day quarantine in hospital earlier this week.

Tangkeko-Lopez also issued a statement on the matter.

"That report is totally absurd. I stand by our statement that the President checked in at the Asian Medical Center as part of the quarantine. I stand

by my earlier report that as part of her quarantine, she will take the opportunity to undergo her regular, ongoing medical check-ups," Remonde told a news briefing at the Palace.

"She's annoyed and I think it's a normal human reaction when you are subjected to an exaggerated report regarding your health," he said. "This is a very personal matter. The President is a strong person but she's also a woman..."

Remonde and Tangkeko-Lopez explained Mrs. Arroyo had detected the lumps during the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan on her last June before she left for a series of foreign visits.

Clean bill of health

"The President went for her routine yearly gynecological check-up before she left for her trip last June. Some of the test results which needed further follow-up came out while she was still on her trip," Tangkeko-Lopez said.

"So when she was admitted for quarantine in accordance with the Influenza A(H1N1) advisory, biopsies were done, which turned out to be normal and she was discharged with a clean bill of health," she said.

Remonde said such gynecological check-ups are necessary for women aged 40 years and above. The President turned 62 in April.

He said Tangkeko-Lopez pointed out that it was good that Mrs. Arroyo was very conscious of her health.

He said the doctor's statement should put the issue to rest "but unfortunately, some people dug up old medical records of the President and put some spin to it."

"Let those who come out with statements otherwise present their proof or this issue would have no end," he said.

Remonde admitted that because of the sensitivity of the matter, and that because she is the President, he could not di-

By PAOLO ROMERO

rectly inquire on reports that she had breast implants in the past.

"That is something I could not, maybe you can just look if there're implants. I mean, you can look at her, if she's the type who has breast implant. I mean, it's obvious, who have breast implants," he said.

The President told Remonde that she indeed had breast implants in the past, but her stay in the hospital has nothing to do with it.

"The President does not want to make it appear that she is hiding anything," Remonde told *The STAR*.

He also denied the quarantine and check-ups were expensive, saying it is the practice of public hospitals and major medical institutions not to bill presidents "as courtesy."

He said St. Luke's Medical Center, where Mrs. Arroyo is sometimes confined, does not ask for payment.

"So there are no cost implications and there should be no

intrigues about this," he said, adding that the Palace has been transparent about the President's health and did not give any details of the latest check-ups because the tests were okay.

There would be no investigation about how the reports came about, he said, as "leaks are part of our culture."

"Media reporting would be dry if there are no leaks. But what is important is the leak is not a bum steer," Remonde said.

He said Mrs. Arroyo was not surprised anymore about the latest reports as "it is part of our current political culture."

"We'll just pray for our country, our President and those who spread intrigues," he said.

'Don't be caught lying'

But Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay challenged the Palace to come clean on President Arroyo's health condition.

"My concern is whether her medical condition is affecting

her judgment and fitness to govern. As we enter the crucial months leading to the elections, and with all these talks of de-stabilization and no election, we cannot leave the big decisions to someone who may not be physically well," he said.

Binay said that if such a report were true, "then once again, the Palace has been caught lying to the people."

"Then again, there is the issue of cost to the taxpayer. The taxpayers should be told that they paid for medical procedures and not a self-quarantine as claimed by Malacañang," he said.

But Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said that the President is well and busy preparing for her State of the Nation Address, among other matters.

"She is busy attending to documents and the SONA. I was able to talk to her, I think, three times today and from the sound of her voice, there was no indication that she is not healthy," he said. —With Jose Rodol Clapano, Sheila Crisostomo, AFP