

# Aquino passes latest test

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Reuter

When Corazon Aquino pledged retribution Tuesday for the latest coup attempt against her, she also proclaimed the finality of her transformation from hesitant housewife to leader of a tumultuous nation.

For a woman who said her family was her greatest pleasure and agonized over entering politics in the shadow of her slain husband, Benigno, Aquino came through the third and most serious near-putsch in her 11 months in power with remarkable calm.

As troops loyal to Aquino laid siege to a television station where about 100 rebel soldiers were still holding out, her 15-year-old daughter Kris, told reporters at the presidential palace: "My mother is fine. She is laughing."

Under "Cory," whose campaign color — yellow — has come to symbolize hope for millions of her countrymen, the Philippines has emerged determined to stand proud again despite its poverty and crippling foreign debt.

The same woman who said a few months ago the greatest advantage in being president was not having to stop at traffic lights was grim-faced Tuesday as she warned the coup plotters: "There is a time for reconciliation and a time for justice and retribution. That time has come."

Maria Corazon Cojuangco was born on Jan. 25, 1933, into one of the well-established "hacien-

dero" land-owning families of the Philippines's Northern Luzon island.

The assassin's bullet that felled her husband at Manila International Airport in August 1983, catapulted her out of the shadows into the forefront of last February's civilian-backed military revolt.

"I was simply a politician's wife. I was completely in the background. I took care of the home and the children and Ninoy (her husband) took care of the rest," she said in an interview.

**LESSONS.** But the "People's Power" revolt that drove former President Ferdinand Marcos into exile in Hawaii and placed her at the head of a "revolutionary" government with near-dictatorial powers also preceded an object lesson in government for Aquino.

She was buffeted by almost daily rumors of brewing coups by disgruntled elements in the military loyal to Marcos and former Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and weekend rallies by Marcos supporters urging him to return.

While she walked a tightrope in negotiating peace with communist guerrillas who have waged a 18-year-long insurgency, Aquino appeared at times to grope for cohesion within her own Cabinet.

Once her ally in the anti-Marcos revolt, Enrile quickly grew disenchanted with his second-

dary position in the government and became Aquino's biggest critic, sniping constantly at her policy of reconciliation and declaring that she owed her power to the military revolt he led and not vice-versa.

She ended months of apparent vacillation last November when an alleged coup plot by officers loyal to Enrile threw Armed Forces chief Fidel Ramos firmly into her camp.

Enrile was dismissed and Aquino seemed set on the path to the Feb. 2 plebiscite on a draft constitution that would legitimize her government and confirm her in power until 1992.

Tension rapidly built up over the past two weeks, however, and even Aquino's popularity suffered a serious setback last Thursday when troops opened fire at a crowd of farmers demanding land reform who tried to cross a bridge

near the presidential palace.

In announcing an independent inquiry into the shooting in which 15 people died, Aquino summed up the fragility of her situation in a television speech.

"I commiserate with the families of the dead," she said. "I grieve equally over what this does to the ideals we stood for in the struggle to bring freedom and peace to our land."

In what political analysts said was a masterstroke, she overruled her military advisers and ordered troops away from the palace.

She met the angered farmers' leaders and later permitted a huge procession to pass by the palace gates, her own ministers joining in the march.

Two days after her 54th birthday last Sunday, she again addressed the nation, promising that "nothing will derail our efforts to establish full constitutional democracy" as the latest coup attempt ground towards a bitter denouncement.

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