

No survivors; Palace mourns

Tearful Arroyo at service for aides

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Presidential Management Staff (PMS), Ms Arroyo's senior military aide Brigadier General Carlos Clet, Philippine Air Force pilots Major Ronaldo Sacatani and Captain Alvin Alegata, Clet's aide Philippine Navy Police Officer 3 Demilyn Reyno and flight crew Staff/Sergeant Roe Gem Perez.

'A total wreck'

Ifugao Governor Teodoro Baguilat Jr. said that the 1996-model twin-engine chopper, found at mid-afternoon yesterday a day after it took off from Loakan Airport in Baguio for a 20-minute flight to Banaue, was "burned, a total wreck."

"We couldn't really verify how many were already found," Baguilat said. "But right now, the people who went there said everybody's dead." He said that the priority was to evacuate the bodies recovered.

"It will be by foot because it's impossible to airlift. We don't want to endanger the volunteers," Baguilat said. "It looks like they can't be identified right now. We still don't know who's who."

Police reports in Lagawe said the three burned bodies were found in the crash site at Sitio (sub-village) Mang-ngihi in Eheb at past 3pm.

Two of the bodies were inside the wrecked helicopter, while another was recovered a few meters away, PMS chief Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said in a press briefing in Baguio.

Two more bodies were found later in the afternoon and another two were recovered from the

crash site at about 6pm, Pelisco said.

The bodies were later taken to Tinoc, about two hours away by foot.

Rains hamper search

Ms Arroyo thanked policemen, local officials, civil volunteers and other members of the search party "for their tireless efforts."

In a telephone interview, Tinoc Mayor Lopez Tugong said he had asked the rescuers to continue searching for the other passenger, stressing that not all of them were accounted for. The search, he said, was hampered by rains and the difficult terrain.

But Baguilat said aerial search and rescue operation was suspended because of torrential rains. PAF and US Marine choppers were involved in the search.

Ms Arroyo canceled her visit to Ifugao, scheduled April 9.

Chopper in flames

Residents in Barangay Eheb said they saw the helicopter over their village on Tuesday, April 7. Senior Superintendent Pedro Danguilan Jr., Nueva Vizcaya police director, said that the chopper flew across the mountains of Kabayan, Benguet.

Delfin Espera, a *Kabayan* teacher, said he saw the helicopter passing through the town. "Then the helicopter's sound stopped abruptly. It then disappeared. Some residents reported that they saw flames coming from the helicopter," Espera said. ■

by JOEL GUINTO
Inquirer.net

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo led a tearful salute last April 9 to her eight aides who died in a helicopter crash in the northern highlands, as Malacañang vowed a "very thorough" inquiry into the incident.

Finding parallels between the death of her aides, and the Holy Week, the President said: "Like His only Son, whose martyrdom we commemorate this week, what is required from us is our prayerful acceptance of and unshakable faith in the life after death."

Arroyo saw off the remains of seven of the fatalities at the Loakan Airport. The caskets bore the remains of Press Undersecretary Jose Capadocia, appointments secretary Marilou Frostrom, director Perlita Bandayanan from the Presidential Management Staff, Senior Military Aide to the President Brigadier General Carlos Clet, Clet's aide Petty Officer 1 Demy Reyno, pilot Ma-

yor Rolando Sacatani, and co-pilot Captain Alvin Alegata.

Arroyo was in tears during a brief religious service for the late Palace staffers, as she consoled with their families, state-run dzRB radio reported. After the service, the remains were flown to the Villamor Airbase in Pasay City.

The body of the eighth fatality, Sergeant Rohegem Perez, a crewmember of the ill-fated Bell 412, was found in a cliff 60 meters from the helicopter wreckage in the mountains of Tinoc town, Ifugao province, Presidential Management Staff Chief Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said.

Perez's remains will also be flown to Villamor Airbase later Thursday, April 9 Esperon told a news conference at the Mansion aired on dzRB.

Esperon said the eight were "practically recognizable," six of which were found inside the wreckage, one was seen nearby, while Perez's body was found in a cliff.

Asked about the President

shedding tears, he said: "There were shows of emotion, the President was very emotional about this."

A wake is being arranged at the Malacañang Heroes Hall on Thursday, April 9 he said.

The presidential helicopter crashed amid bad weather Tuesday, April 7 while on a flight to Banaue, Ifugao ahead of a visit by Arroyo. The visit was later cancelled.

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) will be leading the investigation, Esperon said.

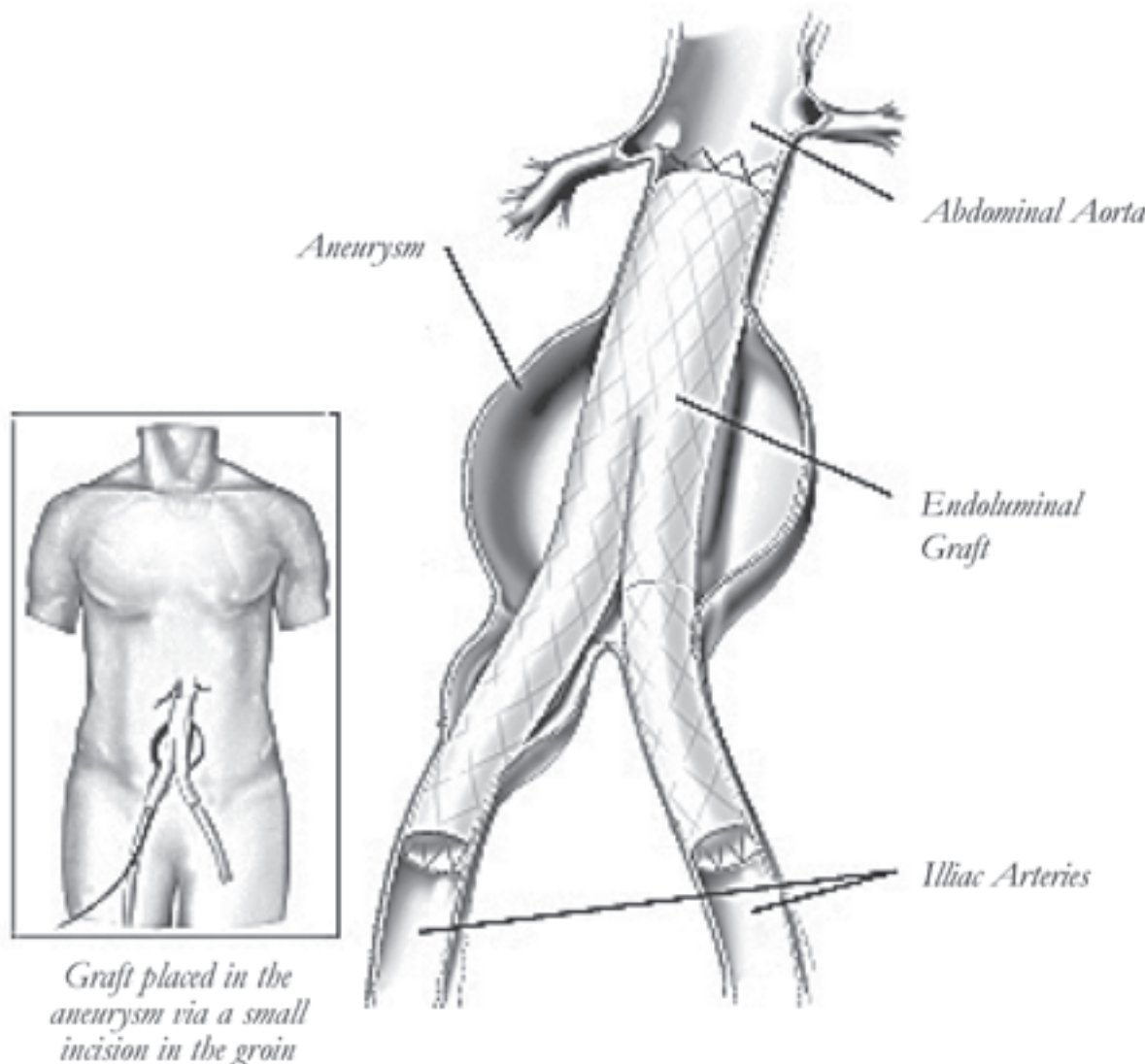
"The weather must have played a lot, just be assured the result of the investigation will be very thorough, [the results will be out] in duetime," he said.

On Wednesday, April 8 PAF Chief Lieutenant General Oscar Rabena ruled out the possibility of a sabotage, saying the presidential helicopters were under heavy guard.

Meanwhile, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde pledged the Palace's "all-out support" for the families of the late staffers. ■

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