

Lest We Forget

A Symbol Dies in Singapore

Filipinos reacted with outpourings of rage and grief today over the execution in Singapore of a Philippine woman whose lawyers had pleaded for mercy on the basis of new testimony suggesting that the mother of four had been framed for murder.

The 42-year-old Filipino maid, Flor Contemplacion, was hanged in Singapore for the 1991 deaths of another maid from the Philippines and a four-year-old Singaporean boy.

News of Mrs. Contemplacion's execution brought protests across the Philippines, where she had come to symbolize the plight of more than two million Filipinos who are forced by this country's grinding poverty to work overseas, usually in menial jobs.

As the first reports of the execution reached Manila this morning, radio and television stations played funeral dirges, and television announcers placed strips of black cloth on their lapels. An all-night vigil in front of the Singapore Embassy here by hundreds of Filipinos was broadcast live on national television.

President Fidel V. Ramos, who had made last-minute pleas to the Singapore Government on the woman's behalf, criticized the execution, saying it was "extremely regrettable that compassion and humanitarian considerations could not temper the force of the law of Singapore." Former President Corazon C. Aquino said that the close relations between the two countries "should have at least encouraged the Singaporean Government to take a second look."

The Singapore Government went forward with the execution after releasing a statement explaining why it had rejected Mr. Ramos's pleas for a stay. It said that Mrs. Contemplacion had confessed to responsibility for the two deaths and that at "no time had she ever suggested that someone else could have been involved or that she was framed." The Singapore Government said that it had investigated assertions contained in new testimony that Mrs. Contemplacion had been framed and that the claims were "found to be untrue."

The testimony came from another Philippine maid, Emilia Frenilla, who said that the Singaporean boy died in an accidental drowning after suffering an epileptic fit, and that the maid, Delia Maga, was killed by the boy's vengeful father, who blamed her for the child's death.

Philippine officials said today that they did not expect to bring any diplomatic or trade retaliation against Singapore. But they agreed that the case has created unusual strains between nations in a region where diplomatic harmony is usually taken for granted.

Extract by PHILIP SHENON, March 18, 1995



Flor Contemplacion, aged 42, executed in Singapore - 2005.



Describing

Mrs. Contemplacion as a "national martyr," the Manila Chronicle said in an editorial today that the execution proved that "behind the facade of prosperity and peace, Singapore is actually a police state, with rights and liberties totally expendable.