

Lualhati Foundation funds depleted, only P70K left

GMA TRAVELS INCOGNITO, MEETS WITH UB'S ABOITIZ

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The funds deposited in Union Bank's Perea Street branch Account No. 00730014836, which Manila International Airport manager Edgardo Manda now claims belong to the controversial Lualhati (Glory) Foundation, but who earlier admitted was not Lualhati's bank account, has been depleted of its funds, with its balance down to only P70,000.

It was in this same account where the P5 million "pay to cash" check of extradited Manila Rep. Mark Jimenez, a.k.a. Mario Crespo, was deposited.

This was disclosed to the Tribune by bank insiders.

It was not known if the donors were informed by Manda, as head trustee of Lualhati Foundation of the withdrawals and whether they have been informed where the donations went.

Manda had earlier stated that the Lualhati Foundation is set to close shop due to the negative publicity it has been receiving.

It was also found that some weeks before President Arroyo had announced her withdrawal from the presidential race in 2004, she had been traveling incognito several nights to a home in San Lorenzo Village in Makati City holding meetings with Endika Aboitiz.

lose presidential crony who has been accompanying Mrs. Arroyo on her trips abroad. He and his family members recently bought out their partners in the shipping business, the WG&A.

Very recently, a new ship was baptized as Doña Eva Macapagal, which rites had Mrs. Arroyo as the special guest.

The Aboitiz family is said to be a big shareholder of the Union Bank, where at least two accounts had been earlier identified as the accounts where the Jimenez checks, amounting to P8 million, had been deposited.

A bank insider hinted that some papers may have undergone some alterations and certain records may have been antedated. He did not elaborate.

The Macapagal family members were reported to have been worried over the Senate probe of the several foundations linked to the presidential couple and had been meeting over the possibility of the Lualhati Foundation being investigated publicly.

There have reportedly been donations made from the United States for the Lualhati Foundation. A Dr. Fajardo, who resides in the US, and is

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said to be an old friend of the President's father, Diosdado, reportedly was alarmed by the news reports on the controversy over the foundation and demanded to see an accounting of the funds, as his name was at stake, since he had been in the forefront of collecting donations in the US for the charity projects to be undertaken by the Lualhati Foundation, a close friend of the Macapagal family told the Tribune.

If this blows up, the source said, it will not only be Fajardo's name and reputation that would be dirtied but that the Macapagal name would be muddied and dishonored.

The source said this was the topic of conversation between the President and her brother, Diosdado "Buboy" Macapagal, which reportedly led to Mrs. Arroyo's decision not to seek the presidency in 2004.

The presidential brother was said to have had a conversation with Dr. Fajardo over the scandal accompanying the Lualhati Foundation and advised his sister not to destroy the family name.

It was then suggested that Mrs. Arroyo should announce her withdrawal from the presidential race, as a way of "short-circuiting" the criticisms and to effect the "soft-peddling" of the probe on the foundations identified with Mrs. Arroyo and her husband.

Apart from the Lualhati Foundations, there is also the Ginintuang at Makabayang Alay (GMA) Foundation, which is said to be run by former Assumption Convent classmates of Mrs. Arroyo.

It was this GMA Foundation which was supposed to have been the recipient of the first P5 million check from Jimenez, who reportedly pledged this amount.

This was never deposited in the GMA Foundation but was reportedly received by Mike Arroyo, the spouse of then Vice President Gloria Arroyo.

At that time, the president of the GMA Foundation was Veronica "Bing" Rodrigo, erstwhile "best friend" of Mrs. Arroyo who had a falling out with the presidential couple. She resigned as communications secretary of Mrs. Arroyo after a spat with the couple.

Another foundation, established by private banker and socialite Ernest Escaler for Mrs. Arroyo for streetchildren which he named Glory to the Streetchildren Foundation, has also solicited funds. This was admitted by Escaler, who is also reportedly involved in the Impsa bribe scam where \$2 million coming from Jimenez, said to represent the share of resigned Justice Secretary Hernando Perez, was deposited in Escaler's Coutts Bank account. Escaler was said to serve as Perez's conduit.

Manda, having discovered that he was being sued by the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission headed by Chairman Dario Rama for graft and corruption, gave dzEC radio and Net 25 TV last Thursday an interview where the airport general manager admitted that the P8 million given by Jimenez was never received by Lualhati Foundation, nor was it receipted by the foundation. Manda also claimed on radio and TV that the two bank accounts in Union Bank Perea Street branch were not the

banks of the foundation.

Manda was quoted as saying: "Being the head of Lualhati Foundation, I don't recall that we have a bank account at Union Bank. We do have accounts in other banks but not in that bank."

He also said he does not remember issuing a receipt to the presidential spouses.

"I don't remember issuing a receipt...because Mr. Jimenez did not personally give me that amount...I am not really sure whether it (the P8 million donation) was really deposited," Manda said during that interview.

The following day, Manda called for a press conference and retracted his statements given to radio and TV, claiming he was confused that day, saying too that the foundation had received the P8 million and that this amount was deposited in the account mentioned, as this belonged to the Lualhati Foundation.

"I was only confused when I said those statements...because you see that happened a long time ago. And besides, I don't have the records of it...as far as this case is concerned, I've been consistent in saying the donations of Mr. Mark Jimenez went to the Lualhati Foundation," Manda said.

He reiterated that the donations were really turned over to the foundation.

"I don't want to make a mistake in answering again so I am consistent in saying the checks (pay-to-cash ones) were indeed directly deposited in the bank account of Lualhati at the Union Bank (on Perea St.), not in any private accounts," Manda said.

"You see, we (Lualhati Foundation) have a bank account at that branch because at (the) time we were holding office at the LTA building of the presidential couple," he added.

He failed to explain, however, why at least two checks of Jimenez were deposited in yet another account at Union Bank.

Manda also did not say if Malacañang indeed had pressured him to conduct the impromptu news briefing.

Neither did the embattled MIAA general manager, perceived to be a crony of the Arroyos, say if the press conference was done on his own initiative.

When Manda was asked how old he is to erase doubts whether he is suffering from mental frailty, he answered, "I am more than 50, but I am not yet suffering from any mental lapses."

Malacanang also indicated that the airport official is now on his own.

Presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye, during a press briefing in the Palace, was quick to defend the First Couple, saying it is the obligation of Manda to rectify his earlier statements.

Although Mr. Arroyo admitted having received the P8-million "pay-to-cash" checks from Jimenez and that they were deposited in the Lualhati Foundation's bank account, Malacanang, according to the presidential spokesman, has no knowledge of the foundation's financial records.

Last December, or when Jimenez revealed on television the political donations he had made to the Arroyos, Manda publicly stated that the Lualhati Foundation had received the checks issued by Jimenez and that these have not only been duly receipted but that the books of the foundation were in order.

The financial statements of the Lualhati Foundation, however, failed to reflect these contributions, but Manda had insisted the papers were in order.

The presidential couple receiving donations in behalf of the foundation had been criticized since the Arroyos claim they are not board members of the organization.

As such, there is no reason for them to receive donations in behalf of either, or both.

It is also believed that the First Couple had allegedly been running other foundations aside from the Lualhati Foundation for political purposes.

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