

50 years apart: Philippine activist fights dictator then son

By Jim Gomez and Joael Calupitan
The Associated Press

MANILA, The Philippines — Memories of the “People Power” revolt by millions of Filipinos who helped overthrow Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos 36 years ago are bittersweet for Loretta Rosales, who opposed him as an activist and was arrested and tortured by his forces before his downfall.

Her battle has gone full circle. The euphoria over that triumph of democracy in Asia has faded through the years and now looks upended with the late dictator’s son and namesake a leading candidate in the May 9 presidential election. Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s rise loomed large as the Southeast Asian nation marked the anniversary in February of the army-backed uprising that toppled Marcos and became a harbinger of change in authoritarian regimes worldwide.

“It puzzles and dismays me,” said Rosales, who remains a pro-democracy activist at age 82 and is now raising alarms over Marcos Jr. She expressed fears he will take after his father and seek to cover up his crimes and failures.

Rosales was among human-rights victims who asked the Commission on Elections to disqualify Marcos Jr. from the presidential race because of a past tax conviction they say showed “moral turpitude” that should bar him from holding public office.

The commission dismissed her petition and five others. All are now on appeal, and an additional one remains pending but will likely also be rejected.

“This is history repeating itself,” Rosales said in an interview. “This is round two.”

Marcos Jr., 64, who has served as a governor, congressman, and senator, leads popularity surveys in the presidential race by a large margin despite his family’s history. He has called the allegations against his father “lies” and his campaign steadfastly focuses on a call for unity while staying away from past controversies.

The four-day revolt that forced the elder Marcos from power in 1986 unfolded when then-defense chief Juan Ponce Enrile and his forces withdrew their support from him after their coup plot against the ailing leader was uncovered. Later joined by a top general, Fidel Ramos, they barricaded themselves in two military camps along the main EDSA highway in the capital, where a Roman Catholic leader summoned Filipinos to bring food and support the mutinous troops.

A mammoth crowd turned up and served as a human shield for the defectors. Rosary-clutching nuns, priests, and civilians kneeled in front of them and stopped tanks deployed to crush the largely peaceful uprising.

The elder Marcos died in 1989 while in exile in Hawai’i without admitting any wrongdoing, including accusations that he, his family, and cronies amassed an estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion while he was in power. A Hawai’i



court later found him liable for human-rights violations and awarded \$2 billion from his estate to compensate more than 9,000 Filipinos led by Rosales who filed a lawsuit against him for torture, extrajudicial killings, incarceration, and disappearances.

After the Marcos family returned from exile in the early 1990s, Marcos Jr. decided to run for congress to protect his family from being hounded politically, he told broadcast journalist Korina Sanchez-Roxas in a recent interview.

In Rosales’s suburban Manila home, a wall is filled with mementos of a life of activism, including as a member of the House of Representatives for nine years and later as head of the Commission on Human Rights until 2015. The only reminder of the worst moments is a grainy military mugshot showing her with a tense smile and carrying a nameplate with the scribbled date 4 Aug 76. That was when she and five other anti-Marcos activists were arrested by military agents while meeting in a restaurant four years after Marcos placed the Philippines under martial law in 1972.

“I was smiling, that was before the torture,” Rosales said.

For about two days in a military hideout, her captors blindfolded her and clipped wires on her fingers and toes and ran streams of electricity that caused her body to convulse wildly, she said. Her mouth was gagged so she could not scream. At other times, she said she was subjected to Russian roulette, in which a captor pointed a revolver to her head and pulled the trigger several times

DECADES-LONG ACTIVIST. Former human-rights chair and martial law victim Loretta Rosales shows a mugshot of her when she was arrested in 1976 during the martial law period as she tells about her ordeal while in detention, at a foreign correspondents forum in this September 26, 2018 photo taken in Manila, the Philippines. Memories of the “People Power” revolt by millions of Filipinos who helped overthrow Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos 36 years ago are bittersweet for Rosales, who opposed him as an activist and was arrested and tortured by his forces before his downfall. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez, File)

to force her to inform on other activists. “There was sexual molestation,” said Rosales, who was eventually freed.

Nearly four decades after democracy was restored, the Philippines remains mired in poverty, corruption, inequality, long-running communist and Muslim insurgencies, and political divisions. Pre-pandemic economic growth mostly benefitted the wealthiest families and failed to lift millions from desperation. At the height of the pandemic, unemployment and hunger worsened to record levels.

“Ordinary Filipinos look at these realities and they question whether this is really what they want,” Manila-based academic and analyst Richard Heydarian said, adding that disenchantment over the failures of liberal reformist politics in the post-dictatorship era steadily grew. “This is where Marcos came in and said we are the ultimate alternative.”

Many Filipinos remember relative peace and quiet under martial law in the 1970s as well as lavish infrastructure projects, and Marcos Jr. has promised increased prosperity and peace.

His current strong following did not emerge overnight. As a vice presidential candidate in 2016, he won more than 14 million votes, losing to Leni Robredo by only 263,000 votes.

Robredo, the leading liberal opposition candidate in the presidential race, ranks second in most popularity polls but is far behind Marcos Jr. three months before the vote.

In a measure of how history has shifted, Enrile, now 98, has endorsed Marcos Jr.’s candidacy. Ex-army Col. Gregorio Honasan, a key leader of the coup plot against the elder Marcos, has been adopted by Marcos Jr. in his senatorial slate. Honasan, 73, said he has not decided whom to support among the presidential aspirants but that the choice of the people should be respected.

“If the Filipino people decide to have a collective national amnesia and say, ‘let’s give another Marcos a chance,’ who are we to question that?” Honasan said in an interview.

Rosales, who backs Robredo, remains hopeful and pointed to large numbers of volunteers who are campaigning for the current vice president on social media and across the country due to exasperation over corrupt and inept politicians.

“This volunteerism is a new kind of resistance,” Rosales said. “It is people power.”

Associated Press journalist Kiko Rosario contributed to this report.



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	5			9		
	7	1		4	8	3
4			6	8		5
	6		3	1	7	5
	4		9	8	5	2
7			8	6		9
	5	2		3	7	8
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Difficulty level: Easy #59714

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #64187 (Hard)

All solutions available at www.sudoku.com.

5	6	3	9	4	2	1	8	7
1	9	2	6	8	7	5	4	3
7	4	8	1	5	3	6	9	2
8	2	1	5	9	6	3	7	4
6	3	7	4	2	1	9	5	8
4	5	9	7	3	8	2	6	1
2	1	6	8	7	9	4	3	5
9	8	4	3	1	5	7	2	6
3	7	5	2	6	4	8	1	9