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Arroyo's Critics Plan to Release 'Fake' Tape, Official Says

June 6 (Bloomberg) -- Philippine opposition politicians plan to "destabilize" the government by releasing a purported tape of President Gloria Arroyo discussing plans to cheat in last year's elections, her spokesman said in a statement.

The tape, in which Arroyo seems to be talking with a Commission on Elections official, is fake and did not come from U.S. government sources as the persons behind it will claim, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said. In ABS-CBN News interviews, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel and U.S. Embassy Spokeswoman Karen Kelly denied knowledge of the tape.

The opposition members will release the tape after their "failed" attempt to "smear" the government with allegations that Arroyo's son and husband have received payoffs from illegal gambling operators, Bunye said.

Arroyo's popularity dropped to a record low last month, Social Weather Stations, one of the country's leading polling organizations, said on June 3. Her ratings fell as inflation stayed close to a six-year high, she successfully pushed Congress to raise taxes and the allegations against her husband and son surfaced.

On May 19, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported three unidentified people linked Arroyo's husband and son to jueteng, an illegal and popular form gambling in the country, prompting her to order an investigation. On May 30, a self-proclaimed former jueteng operator told a Senate investigation panel that he had paid protection money to a man who claimed to be a go-between for Arroyo's son.

Arroyo's son and the alleged go-between denied the allegations, according to local media reports. The jueteng operator will continue his testimony when the Senate panel resumes hearings today.

Allegations linking former President Joseph Estrada to jueteng helped oust him from office in 2001, paving the way for then Vice President Arroyo to take power. She won a six-year term last year. The opposition charged with cheating and her challenger died of a heart attack in December.

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