

FG to accompany GMA in US trip

By DELON PORCALLA

authorities allegedly for money laundering.

"I'm not going, but my father will. That will settle all these evil talks about his supposed legal troubles in the US," the presiden-

tial son said in a text message, squelching allegations that his father had significant exposure in the bankrupt Lehman Brothers.

Mr. Arroyo had accompanied the President on her trip to Brazil

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First Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo is joining President Arroyo on her US visit on July 30.

Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo said his father's decision should end "evil talks" about his being under probe by US

earlier this month.

Mr. Arroyo's lawyer, Ray Rondain, and Rep. Arroyo told **THE STAR** in separate interviews that the trip would disprove rumors that the First Gentleman was banned in the US.

"Those rumors don't really affect us because they're not true," the lawyer Arroyo said.

Rondain reiterated his challenge to critics to stop proof that Mr. Arroyo would be arrested in the US and he would treat them to an all-expense paid trip to the US.

Reports earlier revealed that around 100 congressmen have been jostling for slots in Mrs. Arroyo's US entourage, but Speaker Prospero Nograles said he can only accommodate seven of his colleagues.

But left-wing lawmakers like Anakapawis Rep. Joel Maglansod, who represents farmers and workers, said Filipinos have nothing at all to expect from the highly anticipated meeting between Mrs. Arroyo and President Barack Obama.

"We bet the President is drooling with excitement in anticipation of finally meeting Obama but we could not possibly expect any decisive and major policy changes that will benefit the people out of the Obama-Arroyo meet and greet," he said.

After three failed attempts to meet Obama since his inauguration last year, Arroyo was finally invited to visit Washington at the end of the month.

"In fact, we are wary of new US prescriptions on the Philippines' economic, political and military policies, especially as the Arroyo government is strongly pushing for Charter change and shift to parliamentary government," the militant lawmaker said.

"Arroyo may perhaps ask for Obama's blessings in convening the constituent assembly come July 30 and her electoral plans for 2010," Maglansod added.

Maglansod said the meeting will just be an "affirmation of allegiance to US policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization."

"So far, the government has not significantly addressed the impacts of the global financial crisis on the local economy. Instead, it has constantly refused to grant any form of economic relief for workers and the people," he stressed.

Development aid

President Arroyo will seek more development aid and support for the peace process in Mindanao as well as more investments for the country in her meeting with Obama.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo is expected to promote the Philippines as an ideal location for increased US investments that will provide jobs for "the world-class, highly competitive and productive Filipino workforce."

He also said apart from Mrs. Arroyo, only five other officials will be present in the talks with Obama, including Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, Nograles, and Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romualdo.

It was not clear whether Mr. Arroyo would be present in the meeting.

Remonde said the President will leave Wednesday night, July 29 for Washington on a commercial flight that will have a brief stopover in San Francisco.

He said Mrs. Arroyo will have a meeting with the House Ways and Means Committee of the US Congress and lunch with the leaders of the RP-US Friendship Caucus, a group of American congressmen who are friendly to the Philippines.

She will also grace the reception of Sen. Harry Reid, the Democrat majority leader of the US Senate, and speak at the forum on the Coral Triangle with National Geographic.

"This will include discussion on the Coral Triangle initiatives to protect our marine resources and range of other issues including the global economic crisis to mitigate the impact on the poor everywhere and in the Philippines," he said.

Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo will also tackle with Obama the launching of the National Youth Service Corps and the importance of the US as the country's leading trade and investment partner.

On the American business community where she will make a very strong pitch for the Philippines, highlighting our country's resilience in the face of the global economic crisis," Remonde said.

Culminating her visit to the capital, he said, is a dinner with the Filipino community in Washington.

On Saturday, Aug. 1, Mrs. Arroyo will leave Washington for an overnight stay in New York to meet with various American investors in the Philippines.

She will also stay overnight in Chicago to meet with top US businessmen and the Filipino community.

From Chicago, Remonde said she will proceed

to Guam to meet with the Filipino community and state officials, many of whom are of Filipino descent.

He said Mrs. Arroyo is tentatively scheduled to be back in Manila on Aug. 5.

Lessons learned

Still smarting from the widespread criticism over the huge expenses incurred by the government for her overseas trips, Mrs. Arroyo decided to take a commercial flight for her upcoming trip to the United States.

The flight, leaving on July 29th for San Francisco, will be one of the few commercial flights

she has taken for her official visits overseas.

Charges of wasting taxpayers' money on frequent travel have dogged the Arroyo presidency.

Recently, Sen. Panfilo Lacson questioned the wisdom of her overseas trips and her habit of bringing the "whole Arroyo clan" with her, as well as some of the families of House members.

"They can say there was a \$2-billion investment (arising from the trip) but did the investment arrive? The taxpayers' money is probably just wasted because of President Arroyo's frequent travels," he said.—With Marvin Sy, Paolo Romero