

EDITORIAL

Duterte is exploiting Covid-19 to impose fascist dictatorship

The Duterte regime is exploiting the Covid-19 crisis to further accumulate authoritarian powers and tighten its grip on power. The pandemic is far from contained. Yet instead of more aggressively undertaking needed public health measures, it is threatening to further mobilize its military forces and place the country under martial law "total lockdown" and establish a fascist dictatorship.

More than a month ago, the Filipino people were made to accept the quarantine and lockdown measures as a means to slow down the spread of the virus with an expectation that the necessary public health measures and socio-economic assistance will be carried out with urgency. However, these measures were not carried out competently, sufficiently and expeditiously. One month after the lockdown was imposed on Luzon and in many parts of Visayas and Mindanao, the Covid-19

continues to spread across the country and infect more and more people. Millions of families suffer hunger, anxiety and uncertainty as Duterte and his inept generals lurched from one ill-thought plan to another.

The regime has failed to carry out the necessary measures to enable the public health system to fight the spread of the virus, and to provide socio-economic support to the millions of families during the lockdown. Government agencies

have been sloppy and haphazard in planning a response to the crisis.

It has yet to take steps to systematically carry out mass screening and testing of the population, as the most crucial component in the fight against the pandemic. It has relied on the initiative of private hospitals, organizations, and local government units. It has not realigned enough funds to build new facilities, hire doctors and nurses, train health workers, or set up factories to produce equipment for protection, mass screening and testing. It has prioritized funding to increase the "hazard pay" of police and military personnel, instead of health workers.

After initially bragging that he has the money, Duterte declared

that his government is broke as an excuse for the bureaucratic, chaotic and tightfisted distribution of funds for "social amelioration." Funds for distribution are insufficient. The workers and semiproletariat are suffering the worst from the lockdown and the government stinginess. Middle-income earners are also becoming increasingly desperate with savings running out. With help from private organizations running out, they are being compelled by their economic conditions to defy the restrictions to seek ways to earn a living.

The regime's Covid-19 response is being led by military officials, instead of public health experts, resulting in a militarized approach to the crisis. There is a rapidly increasing deployment of military forces in the National Capital Region. Military and police forces are exercising martial law powers to "impose order." Tens of thousands have been arrested and detained for quarantine violations.

Amid the public health crisis, the regime deployed thousands of

soldiers in the rural areas to further intensify counterinsurgency, wasting hundreds of millions of pesos in very costly combat operations, bombing, psywar and drone surveillance. His soldiers roam the countryside without proper health precautions, making the so far insulated barrios vulnerable to infection. As in the cities, he set up checkpoints in national and provincial roads, forcing people to unnecessarily stop for useless "temperature checks" which only expose them to possible infection.

Despite the urgent need for economic reforms, the government has chosen to stubbornly stick to the neoliberal measures which, in the first place, has taken away funds for health and public services. It has refused to heed the clamor for suspending debt servicing and instead plans to borrow more money, bury the country deeper in debt and impose new taxes in the future.

To strengthen his authoritarianism and justify his plans to impose more draconian measures, the





Duterte regime is blaming the people for the spread of the disease. Duterte puts a spotlight on some recalcitrants to condemn everyone except his own errors, failures and ineptitude. He has resorted to outright lying, falsely claiming to have had the foresight and imposed early the lockdown to prevent the spread of the disease.

The plain truth is that the Duterte government refused to heed the demand of the people as early as January and February to close the country's borders to China where the virus originated. It imposed the lockdown on Luzon too late and without the necessary accompanying measures to detect and contain the virus, and worse, without sufficient social support to tide the broad masses over the crisis.

Duterte is browbeating the people to make them believe that the virus can be defeated by his authoritarian "just obey" dogma. He is using the people's fear of the virus to make them bow in submission to his authority, and paralyze them by compelling them to "stay at home." As the people's fear of the virus is overcome by their desperation to live and earn a living, Duterte resorts to instilling fear of his wrath backed by his proven murderous record.

Without mass screening, testing and contact-tracing, even with Duterte's lockdown and checkpoints, the virus has continued to spread undetected and now threatens widespread infection in the congested urban communities. People in the rural areas, especially the hinterland communities, may ultimately be infected in numbers if the government remains unable to detect the spread of the virus.

Wearing face masks, physical distancing, practicing proper hygiene and maintaining sanitation are necessary measures to help prevent or slow down the spread of the virus. However, stopping the spread of the Covid-19 can only be done effectively with mass screening and testing, rigorous contact

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tracing, and judicious isolation and quarantine measures. It is only through such measures can the chains of transmission be broken.

The experience of South Korea, Vietnam, Venezuela, Iceland, Canada, Taiwan and other countries prove that the spread of the virus can be controlled or slowed down through detection and isolation, even without the overly restrictive measures against travel and work and certainly without the heavy-handed use of military and police to enforce people's compliance with public health measures.

The spread of the Covid-19 in the Philippines has already reached a relatively advanced stage with the number of infections reaching more than 6,200. Thus, there is need to urgently conduct screening and testing, as well as contact tracing on a mass scale. This requires the mobilization, training and equipping of tens of thousands of health workers in order to scour communities, factories, schools, and so on. The scientific community must be mobilized and heeded in order to determine how to systematically and effectively conduct this campaign. The machinery must be built with the help of local government units, civic and religious associations, scientists, doctors and health workers, and people's mass organizations. There must be open consultations and everyone must be encouraged to do their utmost to defeat the spread of the virus.

To their credit, some local officials have gone against the orders of Duterte's generals and aimed to carry out widespread testing, contract-tracing, loosening of quarantine measures, as well as distribution of financial aid. These efforts, however, will be in vain if these will be done in isolation from each other. There must be initiative on the ground with fund support, push and coordination from the top.

In other words, to surmount the Covid-19, democracy must be unleashed, not suppressed. No

amount of Duterte's tyranny can defeat the spread of the Covid-19. On the contrary, without mass testing and contact-tracing to detect and isolate the virus carriers, Duterte's lockdown and quarantine restrictions are blind measures and mere fascist tools designed to suppress democracy.

In the face of the Duterte regime's continuing failure to control the spread of the Covid-19, it is incumbent on the Filipino people to more actively demand the government to carry out widespread mass screening and testing, and contact tracing, and oppose the indefinite extension of the military lockdown and checkpoints which has caused an intolerable humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, they must push for immediate and sufficient social support as recompense in the form of cash distribution. They can push the government to allot funds enough to provide every family with the equivalent of the daily minimum wages set by the government. The Filipino people have been demanding Duterte and his inept generals to answer for their failed Covid-19 response. Failure to heed these urgent demands will only further stoke the people's demand for Duterte's resignation or ouster through direct democratic action.

Amid the lockdown, economic hardships and lack of government support, the people's mass organizations must continue to carry out mutual aid efforts in their communities and strengthen people's solidarity to bring together their efforts to help each other surmount the economic and health crisis. They can continue setting up community kitchens, collective buying of supplies, cooperative stores, production of face masks for the community, and raising funds through donations and other means. They must identify and give extra effort to help those requiring extra assistance and care, such as the elderly and infirm, pregnant women, single-parents and others.

Unions must demand that work-

ers be paid compensation to cover their cost of living in the past month under lockdown. Workers in factories, restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacies and other establishments must demand safety measures in their workplaces to protect them against Covid-19 infections. Contractual workers must demand assurances of continued work and job security.

Market vendors, as well as small shop owners can demand rent reduction or suspension for their stalls. Farmers must demand state subsidy for the purchase of rice and other farm produce to save them from bankruptcy and help ease consumer prices. Local government units can demand greater funds to respond to the urgent demands and needs of their constituencies.

The Party calls on all its committees in the cities to further strengthen and consolidate themselves, and help guide and lead the people and their organizations to confront the crisis.

In the countryside, the Party calls on the New People's Army to give priority to responding to the public health and economic needs of the people. The extension of the ceasefire in response to the United Nation's call for a global ceasefire will give all NPA units the opportunity to expand its reach among the masses to conduct a public health campaign to help the peasant masses prevent Covid-19 infections and prepare for its possible spread in their villages. They must continue to conduct information drives, at the same time, help train the community in screening, preparation of the necessary facilities and equipment for isolating and treating patients, and emergency transportation to city hospitals. They must moreover assist the masses in waging antifeudal struggle and raising production in the face of an imminent economic downturn.

At the same time, the NPA must be on high alert in the face of the

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intensified operations of the AFP. While maintaining the strictest secrecy to avoid detection, they must be ready to engage in battle the fascist forces who are determined to prevent the people's army from extending its support and service to the people.

The Filipino people must seek to overcome the state of social paralysis that they have been forced into by the Duterte regime's lockdown. They must find ways to express their voices and take collective action. They must not only overcome their fear of the virus, but shatter as well the terror of Duterte's de facto martial law rule. **AB**

Regime prioritizes debt servicing over people's welfare

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of the Philippines (CPP) criticized the Duterte regime for refusing to cancel foreign debt servicing amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Department of Finance Sec. Sonny Dominguez stubbornly declared that debt moratorium has never crossed their minds, even as their programs are failing and their aid allocation insufficient. He stated this after the International Monetary Fund suspended the debt payment of 25 countries affected by the pandemic.

The CPP said that Dominguez's position proves the anti-people policies and priority of the regime. Instead of prioritizing the welfare of the people who were hardly hit by the crisis, the regime's is hell bent on preserving its high credit rating in order to get more loan contracts in the future. This year, the regime allocated a total of P285.8 billion for foreign debt servicing. The largest amounts will be paid to the Asian Development Bank (P37.7 billion) and World Bank (P23.8 billion), and the governments of Japan (P22.4 billion), China (P1.2 billion), and the US (P950 million). **AB**

CPP extends ceasefire amid counterinsurgency ops

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) on April 15 directed all commands and units of the New People's Army (NPA) and the people's militia to extend its unilateral ceasefire declaration until April 30. The extension aims "to ensure quick and unimpeded support to all people requiring urgent medical, health and socioeconomic assistance in the face of the public emergency over the Covid-19 pandemic."

The declaration was issued despite the difficulties and dangers brought about by the continuing occupation and operation of military and police troopers in rural communities.

Related to this, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines submitted a letter to the United Nations informing it about the Duterte regime's violation of its ceasefire which was declared on March 16 and took effect from March 19 to April 15.

Based on Ang Bayan's initial compilation of reports from March 16 to April 15, the military and police continued to carry out counterinsurgency operations in 104 towns and cities, covering 219 villages.

These operations resulted in 14 armed encounter in various parts of the country. Thirteen of these were raids against temporary NPA encampments. Three each were recorded in Quezon Province, Bukidnon and Zamboanga, and two in Davao.

The most recent incident was the 67th IB's raid against Red fighters in Mahan-ub, Baganaga, Davao Oriental on April 11. Another encounter ensued a day earlier in Barangay Cabas-an, Aroroy, Masbate in Bicol after 2nd IB and PNP elements attempted to encircle an NPA team who just finished conducting a Covid-19 information drive in the area.

The highest number of violations were reported in Quezon Province (29) in Southern Tagalog, next to Bukidnon (27), Negros Occidental (25), and Masbate (24).

Most soldiers who enter rural communities are outsiders and do not wear face masks. In Abra, residents from seven villages in the town of Malicbong complained over nightly patrols conducted by soldiers which keep them awake.

On the last week of March, 24th and 69th IB troopers ransacked the quarters of small-scale miners in Barangay Guinguinabang, Lacub, Abra, stole their personal belongings, and burned their mining equipment. The troopers also razed a large portion of the forest between the towns of Lacub and Malicbong, and stole and butchered a farmer's cow.

Residents from several communities in Negros, Zamboanga and Misamis Occidental also reported that soldiers are initiating cockfights and drinking sprees.

In a report submitted by the NPA-Southern Tagalog on April 15, it disclosed that the military continues to operate in 157 villages across the region. In Quezon alone, the military and police continues to conduct counterinsurgency operations in 105 villages. Thirteen villages in Palawan are also militarized. **AB**

Military rampage in Pantaron Range

The 10th ID recognizes neither the pandemic nor ceasefire in its fascist campaign in Mindanao's Pantaron Range. From March 24 to April 1, two of its battalions (60th and 56th IB) launched extensive combat operations in Lumad sitios and barrios along the border of Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon and Davao del Norte.

On March 24, around 6 a.m., the New People's Army (NPA)-Bukidnon was able to thwart an attack of the 56th IB against an encampment of Red fighters near Barangay Mandahikan in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. Number of soldiers died after being hit by a command-detonated explosive. In retaliation, the 10th ID bombed the surrounding area of the barangay using an FA-50 at around 7 a.m. It dropped four rockets and a bomb. Simultaneously, four artillery rounds were fired from Loreto, Agusan del Sur. At 10:30 a.m. on the same day, the reinforcements were again thwarted by the NPA. Starting at 1 p.m., artillery rounds started hitting the ground near the community. The bombs landed 330-400 meters away from the community, frightening Lumad children.

The AFP bombed the area again on March 27. Within an hour, it fired three rockets and three artillery rounds. It deployed 6 more columns in the area using a helicopter. Three more rockets and three cannons were fired afterwards.

The operation covered Sitio Min-

dao, Barangay Manggaod and sitios Umayam and Magemon in Barangay Mandahikan, Cabanglasan, Bukidnon; Sitio Tapayanon, Barangay Gupitan, Davao del Norte; and another community in Loreto, Agusan del Sur.

More than a year of suffering under the 10th ID

This area in Pantaron has long been militarized. In March 2019, the 10th ID declared the Tapayanon community as a "newly discovered tribe" that the government has "never reached." In reality, 67th IB has long been going in and out of the community, while Alamara paramilitary forces have long been besieging the area. In fact, the Alamara killed the sitio's datu, Loredno Pocoan, on February 4, 2017.

The 10th ID presented Tapayanon as a new discovery so that the Regional Task Force-End Local Communist Armed Conflict can use it as a showcase. High-ranking military and government officials visited to have their pictures taken in the area. Government agencies poured food, funds and projects, in return for the residents' "surrendering" and turning over

their homemade guns.

Before coming into the area, 10th ID forces first bombed neighboring sitios to ensure that the residents are paralyzed by terror. Around 200 soldiers entered the sitio and encamped in the middle of the community. Because of this, some families fled the area. Up to now, they are temporarily staying at the capitol grounds in Malaybalay City. Tapayanon was previously part of Cabanglasan.

Since then, the 10th ID has placed the sitio on permanent lockdown. Soldiers barred 105 families (525 individuals) living here from leaving the area to buy necessities. They forced all residents to "surrender," including children who they paraded as "child soldiers." They banned peasants from going to their farms, saying that they will just use the opportunity to complain to the NPA. They force married and single women to line up in front of their detachment every Saturday so that soldiers can have their pick and rape them. During their long occupation, they impregnated a lot of women, and wrecked many families. They coerce Lumad men to do reconnaissance, and work like slaves in their camp, ordering them to fetch firewood and water, and work as night guards. They make the men wear military uniforms and forcibly recruit them to the CAFGU. AB



₱112,050
cost per flight hour



₱605,934
21 artillery rounds



₱1.8 M
minimum ammunition

MINIMUM COST OF A
9-DAY MILITARY
OPERATION
₱10,578,322

₱4.45 M
food allowance,
salary hazard pay
for 300 soldiers




₱470,000
cost per flight hour



₱623,288
8 rockets



₱2.4 M
per bomb

NPA counteroffensives in Negros and Masbate

A unit of the New People's Army (NPA) successfully countered an attack of the 94th IB at Sitio Kamuag, Barangay Carabalan, Himamaylan City on April 19. The unit was attacked while conducting a health campaign against Covid-19 in the said area. The Red fighters remained alert against military attacks even with the Communist Party of the Philippine's extension of its unilateral ceasefire declaration until April 31. Three assaulting soldiers were killed including a lieutenant, while four others were wounded during the 30-minute encounter.

The NPA-South Central Negros (Mt. Cansermon Command) belied the statement of the 303rd IBde that Red fighters are "stealing" relief goods for residents. It also condemned the 94th IB for using the Social Amelioration to justify its conduct of combat operations in the area.

In Masbate, 2nd IB and police elements also attempted to encircle an NPA unit in Barangay Cabas-an, Aroroy on April 10. The unit just finished conducting a Covid-19 information drive and was set to return to camp when it

was attacked by soldiers. A soldier was killed and nine others were wounded in the counteroffensive. In retaliation, the soldiers arrested three civilians whom they accused of being members of the people's militia.

As the Duterte regime's unilateral ceasefire declaration lapsed on April 15, military and police combat operations have intensified. Successive attacks were mounted against NPA units that are conducting health and other campaigns in various parts of the country. AB

Lies of the 8th ID

The Armed Forces of the Philippines is relentlessly fabricating stories to justify its counterinsurgency campaign during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among its biggest lies was the false information peddled by the 8th ID that Red fighters "robbed" the food aid intended for residents of Sitio Bangon, Guinmaayohan in Balangiga, Samar on April 7.

Even town officials belied this story. In a report published by the Eastern Samar News Service on April 11, local officials including the town mayor, those who were distributing relief goods, and even the chief of police denied such an incident took place in the area.

Despite this, the 8th ID has insisted on peddling this story. On April 13, it compelled the local government of Balangiga to issue a resolution condemning the action of the NPA. However, local officials refused to comply with the order of the military to declare that Red fighters "forcibly took" or "robbed" the food aid and just said that they just "took a portion" of it.

Meanwhile, the AFP is using aid distribution as a guise for counterinsurgency. In Sorsogon, the 31st IB

which is currently occupying a certain village in Bulusan attempted to take over the distribution of relief goods which were solicited by barangay officials. The soldiers wanted to grab the credit and take photos of each beneficiary. The barangay officials refused to hand them over the aid and confronted the soldiers instead.

The opposite is happening in Bukidnon. Twenty-five barangays and Lumad communities in Cabanglasan and San Fernando were denied aid just because the military accused these of being NPA bases. Before the pandemic, the NTF-ELCAC used the said areas as showcase of its E-CLIP program. Instead of providing aid, soldiers further tightened restrictions imposed on residents. AB

State forces arrest 3 farmers in Masbate

FARMERS ROMNICK Vargas, Juan Dikino and Alden Javier were arrested by 2nd IB and police elements in Barangay Cabas-an, Aroroy, Masbate on April 10. The three were apprehended after an encounter between the said troopers and an NPA unit. The victims were accused of being members of the people's militia.

On the same day, the troopers burned the house of Basyon Meralles and forcibly evicted residents Jun Dikino and Marven "Binoy" Grazil from the village.

The said attacks were spearheaded by 2Lt. Jay Zachary Tunguia.

Under the guise of the Retooled Community Support Program, the military and police continues to conduct counterinsurgency operations in the towns of Aroroy, Mandaon, Claveria, San Pascual, Batuan, Monreal, San Fernando, San Jacinto and Cawayan in Masbate, covering at least 24 barangays.

In Ticao island, soldiers gunned down civilian Kiko Garamay, 30, on March 10. The victim was a resident of Barangay Rizal, Monreal. On the next day, the troopers also killed civilian Nongnong Hermosa, 50, a resident of Sitio Elawod, Barangay Macarthur in the same town. AB

Plight of the semiproletariat amid the lockdown

"We'll die from either two things: hunger or the virus. I think we'll die earlier because of hunger."

It's been a month since Rodrigo Duterte implemented the militarist Luzon lockdown. The number of Covid-positive individuals rapidly increased during the period. On April 20, the total number of infections and deaths reached 6,459 and 428, respectively.

On top of the health crisis, people are also suffering from hunger due to the lockdown. Duterte promised to distribute P8,000 each to 18 million families through the Social Amelioration Program.

The semiproletariat in urban centers are among those hardest hit by the lockdown implementation. They live in cramped urban poor communities and where social services are scarce.

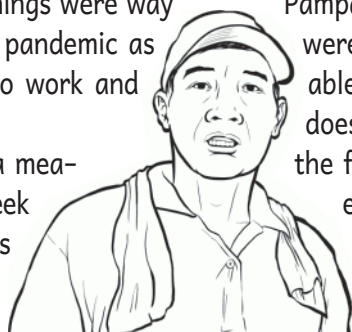
They are those who do not have regular jobs and sources of incomes such as vendors, drivers, jeepney barkers and laundrywomen among others. Like other workers who live on daily wages, they find it extremely difficult to make ends meet for their families especially that they lost their sources of income. For now, they only survive through the help of concerned individuals, groups and institutions.

Emar, house painter

Emar, 39, is a house painter and an employee of a construction company in Metro Manila. He is compensated with P555 per day. He said that his company is relatively better and more humane as it provides its workers subsidies. Despite this, he still finds it difficult to survive.

"The situation today is still difficult. The allowance they give out, unlike my salary, is not sufficient to cover my needs. Things were way better without the pandemic as I could freely go to work and earn a living."

Emar is given a meager P1,000 per week which he stretches to survive. He is not among those



who will receive aid from the regime as his name is not included in the Department of Social Work and Development's list of indigent individuals.

Families with an employed member are disqualified from the agency's aid program. Each household will only receive a single aid package, regardless of the number of families living in it.

Emar said, "I hope they will distribute the aid from the Social Amelioration Program to everyone who needs it. In my case, I can't work, and I also need it. I hope that they will not discriminate and give the amount they have promised. Because if they don't, what will happen to us? If only things were better, people won't need to fight over this P8,000 or P5,000 subsidy."

Joel, 35, jeepney driver

The livelihood of Joel, 35, a jeepney driver, was also badly affected. Joel is married and has three children. His youngest child is only six-month old. Working for 19 hours, he would earn a net income of P2,000, which is then deducted by P1,000 in payment of the boundary fee or rent for the jeepney.

Under the lockdown, Joel lost his source of income because public transportation was banned. He also cannot go home to his family in Pampanga because boundaries were closed, there are no available means, and also because he does not have the money to pay the fare. He only sleeps in his operator's jeepney. His operator provides him food everyday and also receives donations from other concerned indi-

viduals. However, the money he is able to raise is insufficient to make ends meet for his family. He has not received any aid from the local government because he is not a registered voter in the area. He said, "I'm LTFRB registered but they haven't given out IDs so that I will be listed as a beneficiary."

To avoid getting infected, Joel just stays inside his operator's jeepney. His only protection is a face mask. "Support the poor and ensure their livelihood amid the pandemic," demanded Joel.

Where's the aid?

Based on Duterte's report on April 20, only 4 million out of the targeted 18 million poor families have benefited from the Social Amelioration Program. Majority of whom (3.7 million) are beneficiaries of the 4Ps program. Because of the chaotic, difficult and slow process of distribution, only more than 600,000 families (4.5%) of the targeted 13.5 million families of non-4Ps beneficiaries were given aid. The figure has remained almost the same since last week. On April 17, only 2.3% of the estimated 5 million semiworkers received aid. Similarly, only 9% (40,400) of the targeted 435,000 driver beneficiaries provided with subsidies.

Meanwhile, the DOLE suspended its financial aid to workers on April 17 claiming that funds were already depleted. Of the total 10.7 million workers, DOLE only targeted to aid 321,975 families, 237,653 of whom have received subsidies.

The Duterte regime's treachery and lies were exposed by its own Social Amelioration Program. It deliberately made the distribution process stringent by imposing many requirements on the poor. Instead of simplifying the process to ensure the immediate distribution of aid, the regime is oppressing and blaming the poor. It threatens anyone

"Plight..." continued on page 8

Meadly funds for peasant sector amid restrictive lockdown

At least 26 provinces in Visayas and Mindanao declared their respective lockdowns simultaneous with the Duterte regime's implementation of a Luzon lockdown. Commerce and trade in these areas are paralyzed as the transportation of people and products is restricted. Farmers were also forced to halt production in the countryside. Even areas without lockdowns are also affected because majority of those locked down are regional and provincial centers.

Millions of farmers and farmworkers lost their incomes due to the lockdowns.

More than 700,000 workers in sugar centrals and 75,241 farmworkers in sugarcane plantations lost their incomes due to the closure of factories and haciendas. In Bukidnon, the local government ordered the closure of the Sugar Milling Corporation and Crystal Sugar Company, Inc. from March 27 to April 26. Around 10,000 workers and another 10,000 small sugarcane planters are affected by the closure. Thousand of farmworkers in Negros suffered from an early *tiempo muerto* (dead season) with the closure of sugarcane plantations and sugar centrals in the island. Despite this, only 6% of sugarcane farmworkers was aided by the regime.

Only a small portion of aid from the Department of Agriculture (DA) was delivered to them. Even its loan program is limited to only 300,000 which is only 3.7% of the total number of farmers and farmworkers and fisherfolk.

Measly aid

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) pointed out that the agency received a budget allocations of P62.69 billion this 2020. Adding the P31-billion fund it requested on March 25, the agency has a total budget of P93 billion.

Farmers will receive only a small portion of this budget. Nearly 90%

of the budget is allocated in lump sums for projects that do not provide immediate relief to hungry and bankrupt farmers. Duterte's report on April 20 indicates that only 52,000 of the targeted 591,246 million rice farmers benefited from the regime's P3-billion Social Social Amelioration Program. The agency provided no mechanism as to how beneficiaries will receive the aid intended for them.

The DA added that 300,000 poor farmers already received P5,000 each from the Land Bank's Rice Farmers Financial Assistance Program. The agency still has a long way to go in aiding approximately 9.7 million farmers, farmworkers, and fisherfolk in need of immediate assistance.

The regime's aid distribution program is riddled with corruption. Many are complaining over the apparent arbitrary distribution of aid, and the stringent and extremely slow process. In a town in Camarines Sur, the P5,000 aid for senior citizens was slashed by P1,400 as this would purportedly be used to buy medicines, rice and sardines. Senior citizens however noted that no such relief goods were given them.

Senior citizens with their children who are employed will also not be aided, even if they could not make a living due to the lockdown. Workers in groceries, banks and other establishments who are not registered as residents will also not be aided.



Fascist oppression

Curfew and checkpoints in the countryside further causes economic hardships on farmers and farmworkers as they are restricted from transporting their produce.

In several towns in Ilocos, residents were charged P50-P80 each for a daily travel pass. The curfew also limited the number of hours farmers in Cagayan Valley and Lower Kalinga are allowed to work.

Farm produce from Upper Kalinga, Benguet, Ifugao and Mountain Province were barred at checkpoints. In Tinoc, Ifugao, farmers were forced to immediately harvest their vegetables after the local government implemented a lockdown. They struggled to sell nearly 100,000 tons of vegetables at extremely low rates instead of just leaving these to rot. AB

"Plight..." from page 7

who complains of being shot.

More than 136,000 were apprehended, punished or arrested by the police for alleged lockdown violations, such as violations on curfew and social distancing, and illegal "assembly." In Agusan del Norte, a 68-year-old man was shot at a checkpoint by the police for purportedly violating lockdown restrictions.

The militarist lockdown is utterly anti-people, especially that the regime has not laid out any measure to ensure the quick and broad distribution of aid, medical services and mass testing. The conditions which Duterte himself created are pushing semiworkers like Emar and Joel to rise up and oust him from power. AB

Precaution, best measure against Covid-19 in the countryside

The Covid-19 spreads rapidly in the cities because of congestion and close interlinks among its residents. Eventually, it will reach the countryside as peasants leave their areas to sell their harvests and buy necessities in the cities. Workers and investors of mining, plantations and other commercial operations also come and go.

Experts believe that the virus will not spread as quickly in the countryside as areas there are not congested unlike the cities. On the other hand, it can possibly be harder to contain and become more deadly as health systems there are backward and facilities are limited. They advise that the best preparation for the pandemic is to follow health measures recommended by medical institutions. These include maintaining personal hygiene, social distancing, avoiding going to crowded places and contact with infected individuals, consulting a doctor or health worker if one experiences symptoms and staying informed about the locality and national health situation.

But aside from these, the barrio

health infrastructures must be prepared. This entails ensuring enough supplies and equipment, building proper facilities, training of health workers and putting into place a satisfactory communication system.

Currently, supply and equipment in the countryside are insufficient, if there are any, to counter an epidemic or calamity. Medical supplies such as face masks, other personal protective equipment and disinfectants are sourced from cities which are currently suffering from shortages. The barrios have no medicines for infected patients at all.

Trainings for health workers are also limited. According to statistics, there is an average of one doctor, assisted by two nurses and five

midwives deployed in barangays for every town. Often, nurses and midwives manage barangay health centers to provide primary care to pregnant women, infants and elderly. No program has been implemented to train them on how to conduct mass testing or screening, monitoring and contact tracing, and isolation unit services.

More than half of all barangays have no health centers. In 2017, there were only 20,216 health centers in the entire country. Existing centers have very limited facilities. There are neither beds for patients, nor isolation units for the infected. Hospitals, clinics and laboratories are far-flung and oftentimes, making it impossible to transport patients.

Communication systems and information dissemination is also problematic. Wrong information, often tainted by politicking, speculations and unscientific cures are prevalent in the countryside. AB

Nurses demand mass hiring

THE FILIPINO NURSES United demanded the Duterte regime to immediately carry out mass hiring and training of nurses instead of just asking them to volunteer amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The group demanded that nurses must be accorded with just wages and benefits with job security. They also called for the regularization of thousands of contractual workers in public and private hospitals.

There are only 90,308 locally employed nurses, majority of whom are based in Metro Manila. Only 31,000 of them work in public hospitals. Understaffing of nurses has long been an issue in the country, even prior the spread of Covid-19.

A report by the World Health Organization disclosed that there are 536,331 registered nurses in the Philippines as of 2020. Around 200,000 of them are unemployed. Hence, there is a large labor pool of professional health workers. In connection to this, the group asserted that the regime must not prohibit nurses and doctors to leave the country for work amid the pandemic as this violates their right to travel and work. They must be provided with support especially now that they have lost their incomes and might not be able to return to their respective hospitals abroad anymore. It added that the government must also raise the salary and benefits and ensure the job security of nurses and other health volunteers and frontliners in rural villages. In such areas, the highest amount of compensation received by volunteers is only P4,000 per month. Other volunteers, especially those in far-flung barrios, only receive P50 to P150 per month. AB

Workers protest for wages, job security, protection

WORKERS' PROTESTS FOR wage increases, job security and protection on workplaces are erupting across the globe, amid reports of Covid-19 outbreaks in factories and businesses allowed to operate during the pandemic.

In the US, workers from Amazon, Wholefoods and Instacart protested last March to demand that they be given just wages, additional hazard pay and personal protective equipment. Amazon and Instacart are retail companies which deliver products straight to its customers' homes and offices. Wholefoods, also owned by Amazon, is a large grocery store. They have been deemed essential businesses and thus authorized to operate amid the pandemic. Thousands more of American have carried out collective actions to demand necessary protection after news on Covid-19 deaths among workers circulated.

There have also been protests in Amazon warehouses in Italy and US-owned companies in Mexico. In Brazil, doctors and nurses went on strike to demand protective gears. Workers mounted similar protests in India, Burma and Australia. AB

Arrests, bombing amid Covid-19 crisis

State forces continued to perpetrate cases of human rights violations even amid the public health crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. From April 6-19, at least 19 farmers were arrested in various parts of the country. A peasant was killed and a community was bombed in Mindanao during the same period.

Residents of Sitio Kapanal, Barangay Gasi sa Kiamba, Sarangani were awakened at around 5:00 a.m on April 19 when the military dropped at least four bombs near their community using an attack plane.

They grew more restless especially that their community is occupied by the 27th IB. The AFP has long been ravaging Gasi and nearby villages. There are currently 300 troops in the area. The Lapanday Corporation is situated in Kiamba and adjacent towns.

In Miag-ao, Iloilo, the 61st IB killed farmer John Farocillin, chairperson of the Alyansa sang Mangu-nguma sa Miag-ao and a council member of Pamanggas. Farocillin played key roles in advancing peasant struggles in the island.

Before this, 12 civilians, including five minors, were arrested by the 61st IB on April 14. The victims are residents of Barangay Iganulong, Sibalom, Antique, and were gathering honey when they were apprehended. The NPA command in Southern Panay (Mt. Napulak Command) belied the claim of the military that the victims were caught during an encounter. It disclosed that no clash took place in the area.

In Butuan City, state forces arrested Proceso Torralba at Purok 3, Barangay Bonbon on April 11. Torralba or Tatay Sisoy is the chairperson of the Unyon sa Mag-uuma sa Agusan del Norte and has been at the forefront of peasant struggles in the province for three decades already. Toralba was among those implicated by the AFP in a raid of Red fighters against a military detach-

ment in Agusan del Sur in 2018. He was slapped with trumped up kidnapping and serious illegal detention charges.

Two other farmers were arrested in Southern Tagalog and were presented as NPA surrenderees. The victims were identified as Lamberto Asinas who was arrested in Barangay Bundukan, Nasugbu, Batangas on April 16; and Nomeriano Fuerte in Barok Perlas at Sityo Tagbakin, Magsaysay, General Luna, Quezon Province on April 13.

In Nueva Vizcaya, the police arrested Ronaldo Pulido, chairperson of the Alyansa ng Novo Vizcayano para sa Kalikasan on April 6. He was arrested during the demolition of the residents' barricade against the operation of Oceanagold. He was released the next day through the assertion of fellow residents.

AB

Huge oil production cut

SUCCUMBING TO THE pressure of US Pres. Donald Trump, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and other oil-producing countries agreed on April 12 to cut production by 10% or 9.7 million barrels per day from May to June. This will be the highest oil production cut in history.

The reduction aims to arrest plunging oil prices in the global market due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Oil demand further dropped simultaneous with the suspension of operations of factories and enterprises across the globe. As a result, the average price of Brent crude dropped to \$20.09 per barrel, the lowest since 2002. Oil companies, especially those in the US incur huge profit losses, when the price of Brent crude in the global market is lower than \$30 per barrel.

AB

Police arrests former congressman and volunteers in Bulacan

POLICE ELEMENTS ARRESTED former Anakpawis Rep. Ariel Casilao and twelve other volunteers and residents in Norzagaray, Bulacan on April 19. Casilao and five other volunteers were set to deliver relief goods to farmers when they were apprehended at a checkpoint at 10:15 a.m.

They were brought to the Norzagaray police station, along with seven residents who were supposed to receive aid, and were detained there for two hours. They were then brought to the Bulacan Police Provincial Office in Malolos where they are being held until today. They were accused of planning to conduct a rally and were charged with sedition.

The arrest shows the Duterte regime's perverse priorities even amid the pandemic and utter contempt for the plight of the Filipino people. The arrest is a handiwork of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) which is led by Duterte's generals.

AB

Plantation expansion results in bloody conflict

The landgrabbing of Tiruray and Moro ancestral lands by big agribusiness corporations is the reason behind a bloody conflict in Barangay Kalamongog, Lebak, Sultan Kudarat.

The conflict escalated with the entry of the Lapanday Foods Corporation, an agribusiness corporation owned by the landlord comprador Lorenzo family which is notorious for bootlicking whoever is in power. The company has been operating its banana plantation in the area for more than one year. It deceived residents into selling or leasing their lands in exchange for money and employment. However, not all were convinced as some families opposed the entry of the plantation.

The company deployed its private security forces that were backed by the AFP. They employed some of residents who agreed ap-

proved of their operation.

The company provoked the said residents to evict the farmers who are opposed to its operations by claiming that the lands that the farmers have since been tilling are part of their ancestral domain.

The company succeeded in dividing the community. The rift escalated last year after the murder of former barangay captain Diosdado M. Eleazar, who was known for opposing the plantation expansion. Residents disclosed that armed goons were behind the crime but both the local government and the PNP have not acted on the crime to hold suspects accountable.

He was replaced by former first councilor Hairudin Tato Gubel who was a critic of the plantation. He was killed by the plantation's armed goons on March 17. He was replaced by incumbent barangay officer-in-charge Nolasco Zamora Ado who is a personnel of the company.

The company is making it appear that the conflict in Kalamongog is a tribal war between Tirurays and Moros. In an interview, Ado accused the relatives of Gubel of involvement in a shooting incident which took place in Sitio Kiatong on March 25. He is also asserting that the ongoing conflict is politically motivated.

Residents are worried that if the conflict will continue to escalate, they will no longer be able to return to their lands that are being grabbed by Lapanday. **AB**

Relatives file petition for immediate release of vulnerable political prisoners

Relatives of vulnerable political prisoners filed a formal petition before the Supreme Court on April 8 to call for their immediate release amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak, there has been a mounting clamor for the release of prisoners especially the elderly, sick, pregnant and nursing mothers, even temporarily, as they are highly vulnerable to the deadly virus. Among them are 23 political prisoners who are being detained based on trumped up charges.

It is impossible to maintain social distancing in jails due to heavy congestion. Prison facilities also lack sufficient sanitation equipment. In Bicutan where political prisoners are detained, 4-5 individuals are cramped in 2x4-meter cells. Some of them are highly vulnerable as they

are suffering from old age infirmities and various complications such as chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

Conditions even worsened with the Duterte regime's militarist lockdown implementation. Earlier during its implementation, relatives

of detainees were allowed to bring food and medicines through the service of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). This service will be stopped if the reactionary state is going to impose stricter restrictions. Prisoners are fed only twice a day.

Not all prisoners are provided with face masks. There is a high chance that they will get infected in case of an outbreak in prison facilities. In the Quezon City Jail, nine prisoners already tested positive for Covid-19. Nine others suspected of being infected had to be isolated. **AB**