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Editorial

## Oppose emergency powers and Aquino's push for a second or extended term

The Filipino people oppose Benigno Aquino III's proposals for an extended term. They oppose, as well, plans to grant Aquino special powers to enter into contracts to increase domestic power supply, resurrecting the Ramos IPP contracts which led to power rate hikes.

In putting forward proposals for a second term, Aquino is demonstrating an exaggerated sense of self-worth and engaging in megalomaniac fantasies of infallibility and purity. He is conjuring the illusion of deep-going support and widespread clamor for his perpetuation in power. Like all dictators, he portrays term extension as self-sacrifice.

He endlessly weaves a fantasy of economic growth and of his regime's incorruptibility. He is obviously a firm believer in the fascist maxim that a lie repeated often enough will be accepted as truth.

The reality of the socio-economic crisis, however, is extremely stark to be dressed-up otherwise. There is no way of fooling the unprecedented number of jobless people and migrant workers that the domestic economy presents them with opportunities for employment and upliftment. Nor can the toiling

masses of workers and peasants be made to think that the economy is improving when daily they suffer from spiralling prices of food, medicine and medical care, transportation and other basic costs of living.

No one is being fooled by Aquino when he claims that there is widespread demand for him to extend his current term or seek another one. For months now, Aquino's yellow army of specialists in public opinion manipulation has been trying to generate "public clamor" for

"one more term" but could only afford to come up with a poorly

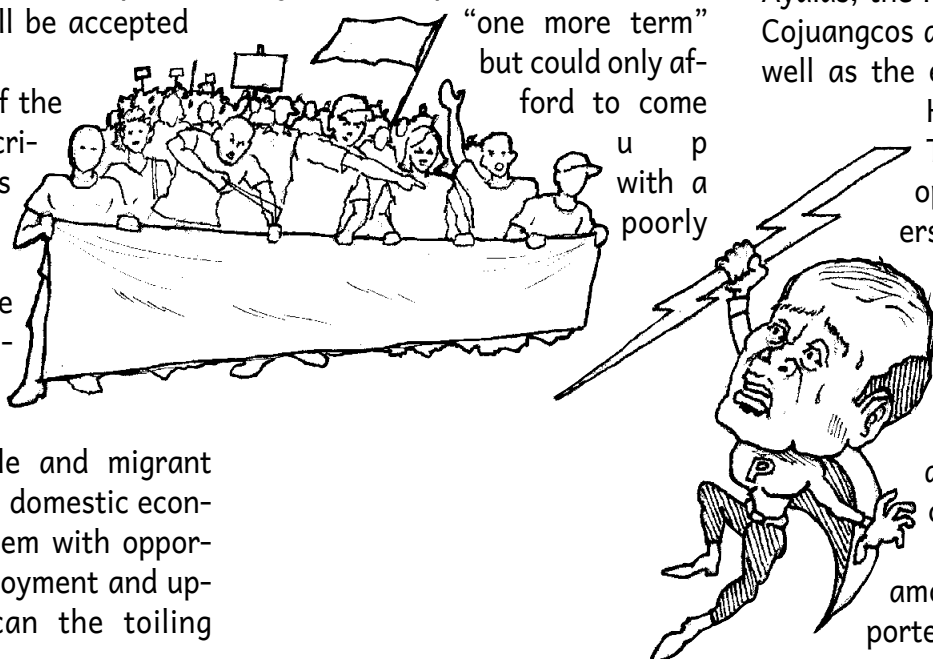
"liked" Facebook page and scantily attended public activities.

There is an objective self-serving basis for Aquino's desire to perpetuate himself in power. He is utterly terrified of the possibility of ending up behind bars like his predecessor Gloria Arroyo, especially amid intensifying demands for his accountability in the anomalous and graft-ridden Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP).

Beneath the false veneer of "good governance," the Aquino regime has, in fact, brought the old bureaucrat capitalist system to new heights. The biggest beneficiaries of Aquino's "economic growth" are a handful of close big business supporters including the Ayalas, the Pangilinan group, the Cojuangcos and the Consunjis, as well as the economic empires of

Henry Sy and Lucio Tan. Aquino has openly usurped powers in order to redirect public funds to projects and programs that invariably serve the interests of big business and aggrandize his political supporters.

Aquino counts among his political supporters the biggest DAP-



fed senators, congressmen and local government officials. These are the people who are ever-willing to support Aquino's presidential dictatorship as long as their pockets are lined with funds whether from the DAP, the PDAF or the Bottom-Up Budgeting System aka the Grassroots Participatory Budgeting Process.

Last week, the ruling Aquino clique rallied these political supporters in a gathering at the Malacañang Palace described as a "show of force." Indeed, this displayed the force of Aquino's patronage politics, where hundreds of politicians lined up in a drama of political fealty to the ruling pork barrel regime. It was Aquino's celebration of the rout of the triple impeachment complaint filed against him in Congress. In return, they expect Aquino to continue lining their pockets.

Aquino's vicious cycle of patronage politics is about to spiral up in the run-up to the 2016 elections. The Aquino regime is building up its political kitty in order to ensure its perpetuation

in power. The 2015 budget is honeycombed with pork barrel and corruption—the Special Purpose Funds, the conspicuous increase in the irrigation and agriculture funds, large funds allocated to "various projects" of local governments, the further bloating of the doleout CCT program from ₱63 billion to ₱78-100 billion and so on—in a bid to accumulate funds for upcoming political battles. Billions, as well, will be allocated to the "extension" of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program which has long served as a milking cow for big bureaucrats.

Aquino is further seeking a redefinition of budget laws in order to continue and expand the practice of reallocating "savings" to whatever program he wants to fund.


He is also seeking "emergency powers" in order to allocate and spend billions of pesos from the Malampaya fund and elsewhere without accountability. Over the past four years, the Aquino regime has deliberately allowed the deterioration of the

power industry by refusing to rehabilitate and improve the hydropower plants in Mindanao and other state-owned power plants in Luzon and elsewhere. The projected shortage of electricity next year has been artificially created by the Aquino regime to serve as blackmail in his bid for special powers. In seeking to enter contracts to purchase electricity at the last minute, the Filipino people are bound to be shortchanged anew. These special presidential purchases of power (without benefit of public bidding) will lead to large amounts of funds ending up in Aquino's political kitty.

Behind the pompous speeches, declarations of seeking another term, display of strength and breast-beating, Aquino is leading a fractious party and coalition that is set to implode as the 2016 election approaches. He hopes to tame intra-coalition antagonisms by putting himself in the middle and portraying himself as a viable option for term extension or reelection.

Aquino, however, is succeeding only in further driving a wedge within the ruling coalition. Eager to gain dominance, the Binay group has no plans of backing down in 2016. It appears that only the Roxas-led Liberal Party is willing to ride along with the scenario of an extended term for Aquino, although even a number of its stalwarts have already expressed disagreement with a "political cha-cha." Whatever the option, neither camp is willing to trust the other to favor them in a post-Aquino scenario.

The crisis of the ruling political clique will continue to worsen amid the reality of deteriorating socio-economic conditions and mounting demands for Aquino's ouster. The Aquino regime is becoming increasingly isolated from the people. **AB**

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# Fiscal dictator

Up to 40% of the Aquino regime's ₱2.606-trillion budget for 2015 is directly controlled and subject to the whims of Benigno Aquino III, including the ₱379-billion Special Purpose Fund.

This amount has been incorporated in the budgets of various government departments or agencies as "lump sums"—single amounts not specifically allotted to any project or program. Aquino directly controls the use of these lump sums.

With funds this size not passing through Congressional scrutiny, Aquino can indeed be considered a fiscal dictator. Aquino has been able to arrogate this right because his minions in the Senate and Congress have been kowtowing to his every wish after having received their pork barrel in exchange for their loyalty and support to the ruling regime.

Aquino's dictatorial powers have been strengthened in the 2015 budget. He uses these powers to further consolidate the support he has been receiving from politicians. On the whole, this all forms part of the Aquino clique's preparations for the 2016 elections.

The most striking feature of Aquino's budget for 2015 is the 80% hike (from ₱17 billion to ₱31 billion) in the lump sum allotted to the Department of Interior and Local Government. The DILG is headed by Liberal Party official Mar Roxas, who is considered its leading presidential candidate for 2016.

Up to ₱27.9 billion of the DILG lump sum consists of local governments' "special shares in proceeds of national taxes" and ₱3 billion comprises the Local Government Support Fund or LGSF. Under the LGSF, ₱2.8 billion has been allotted to Grassroots Participatory Budgeting

(GPB) and ₱200 million to "financial assistance to support various priority programs and projects."

Grassroots Participatory Budgeting or GPB is the scheme that has been adopted in place of the Aquino clique's direct disbursement of the former PDAF since the latter was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. In the 2014 national budget, the scheme was referred to as "bottom-up budgeting." This is merely a new monicker for the practice of distributing pork barrel funds to the most favored congressmen.

Under the GPB, it is the executive that particularizes the national budget allegedly for the congressmen's most urgent projects and programs. This, after a "consultation" where the Aquino clique wheels and deals and enters secret arrangements with its most favored parties and allies regarding their respective shares in the national budget.

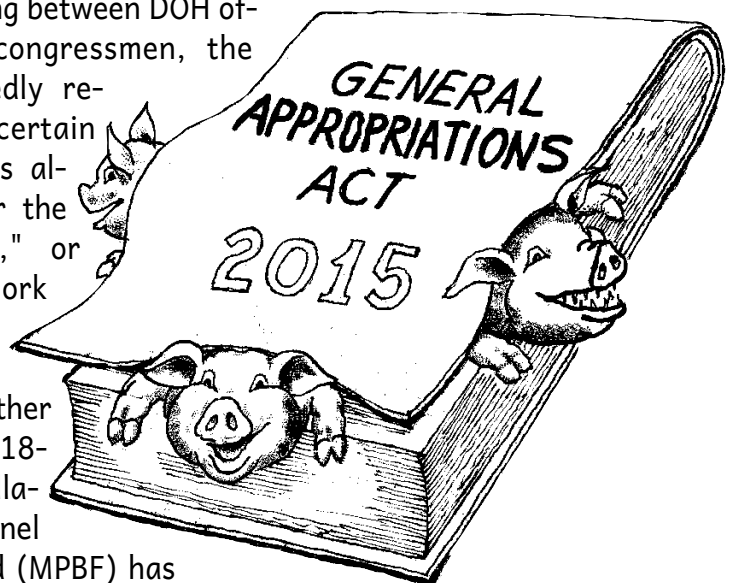
Aside from the DILG, lump sums have also been allotted to various other agencies, including the DPWH, DOH and DSWD. In a recent meeting between DOH officials and congressmen, the DOH reportedly referred to certain lump sums as allotments "for the congressmen," or in short, pork barrel in new garb.

On the other hand, a ₱118-billion Miscellaneous Personnel Benefits Fund (MPBF) has

been inserted into the DBM budget, allegedly for hiring new government employees. Malacañang has been able to control other branches of government like the Supreme Court, the judiciary, the Ombudsman and the Commission on Audit through such funds.

In addition to the Special Purpose Fund controlled by Aquino, there is a ₱152-billion fund allotted to his "personal use" which is outside of the purview of the 2015 national budget. This fund is composed of the ₱123 billion allotted to "unprogrammed expenses" as well as a ₱29-billion off-budget account and direct remittances from the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) and the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO), which are both under Aquino's direct control. Experts say the latter may even go as high as ₱40 billion, depending on the income and funds generated by the PAGCOR and the PCSO.

Aquino likewise controls the ₱140-billion Malampaya Fund. Currently pending at the Senate and House of Representatives is a bill that seeks to grant Aquino special powers to use this fund to enter into new power purchasing contracts with big corporations without benefit of public bidding. **AB**



## OPB budget to swell in 2015

Up to ₱200 billion has been allotted in 2015 for the implementation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Oplan Bayanihan (OPB) campaign of suppression. The upcoming budget is 28% or ₱40 billion bigger than the 2014 budget.

The budget of the Department of National Defense (DND) will also be growing by 21% (₱99.5 billion, up from ₱82 billion), bloating the machinery for militarization and military abuse.

The OPB budget will be sourced not only from the DND, but has been dispersed in various government agencies such as the Department of Interior and Local Government, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). This is in accordance with OPB's design as an ostensibly "people-and development-oriented" program.



DSWD and OPAPP projects (like PAMANA and Kalahiki-CIDSS) fall under the OPB's psywar component. These projects are aimed at deceiving and weakening

the militancy of people waging resistance. **AB**

## ₱30 billion budget to ensure profits of big capitalists

The Aquino regime has allotted ₱30 billion for the so-called Risk Management Program—a mechanism inserted into the budget by the Aquino regime that would ensure the incomes of its big foreign and local businessman-cro- nies.

The biggest chunk of the RMP has been allotted to the MRT7 project cornered by Aquino's uncle Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. and the latter's business partner Ramon Ang.

Also to benefit are the Ayala family and Manuel V. Pangilinan who will be taking charge of the LRT1 extension project and its eventual privatization. Through the LRT1 Extension "Deficit Payment Scheme," the government will be subsidizing any lost income should regulatory agencies prohibit these companies from charging passengers higher fees. **AB**

## Billions of DAP funds for flood control missing

The whereabouts of a third of the funds from the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) provided to Metro Manila for flood control during the monsoon season are unknown. The issue came to the fore when flood waters raged through Metro Manila at the height of typhoon Mario on September 19.

The Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) is looking for the ₱295 million allotted to the "Priority Flood Control Projects-MMSA" and the ₱154 million for "Urban Renewal, Traffic Management Flood Control Phase 1-MMDA" released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) from DAP funds for flood control projects under the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

This DAP allocation is listed on page 69 of the 139-page DAP list given to Congress by DBM Secretary Florencio "Butch" Abad.

The Metro Manila flood control projects under scrutiny form part of "various priority local projects" worth ₱3.8 billion. These funds were released as far back as two years ago to ease perennial flooding in the metropolis. To date, however, only 67% of the projects have been completed, and floods have been worsening in Metro Manila.

Even with the previous budget still not fully accounted for, there is already a ₱38.6-billion fund earmarked for flood control in the 2015 budget. **AB**

# Anomalies involving Drilon and Soliman

The Aquino regime continues to reek of anomalies and scandals.

**ICC project.** One of the anomalies that have been recently disclosed involves Senate Pres. Franklin Drilon and the Iloilo Convention Center (ICC). The project received ₱200 million from Drilon's Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) in 2012 and ₱100 million from the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) in 2013.

The Department of Public Works and Highways and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority also provided funds. It is one of 20 government infrastructure projects in the 2000s suspected of being grossly overpriced.

The construction of the ICC project in Mandurriao, Iloilo City is being fast-tracked and is slated for completion in November because it is one of the venues for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in 2015.

At the price of ₱700 million, it is more expensive by ₱530 million compared to the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City, which is the country's biggest.

Further fuelling suspicions is that fact that its contractor is Hilmarc, the same company behind the reportedly overpriced Makati City Hall Building 2, which is currently the subject of a Senate investigation designed to implicate Vice President Jejomar Binay, under whose watch as Makati mayor the building was constructed.

**Soliman fails to account for aid.** Social Welfare and Development Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman is in hot water because of huge volumes of material as-

sistance gone to pot and for pocketing big amounts of financial aid from overseas.

Up to ₱2.7 million worth of donated canned goods, noodles and rice were found rotting. More infuriating, however, is Soliman's failure to provide a detailed accounting of up to ₱779 million in cash donations from other countries coursed through the United



Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

The WFP reported that it provided \$88 million in food aid to areas devastated by typhoon Yolanda. The WFP also defrayed \$25 million in expenses for telecommunications and \$1.7 million for "food security costs."

In spite of this, the DSWD has not submitted any detailed accounting of these funds. Soliman has also reportedly failed to fully account for the ₱14-billion supplementary budget provided to the DSWD for victims of typhoon Yolanda and other calamities last year.

AB

## UP students confront Abad

Students of the University of the Philippines accosted Budget Sec. Florencio Abad after he spoke at a forum held at the UP School of Economics (UPSE) on September 17. Abad is the main architect of the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) and other pork barrel schemes.

As soon as Abad left the forum, he was immediately surrounded by his bodyguards and hustled away from protesting students who had gathered to confront him. A minor commotion ensued, but Abad later made exaggerated claims that he was actually manhandled by the students.

In a statement, the League of Filipino Students said it could no longer stomach Abad's defense of the pork barrel system and its persistence in the 2015 budget amid the undeniable existence of systemic corruption and the people's growing struggle to end it.

On the other hand, the condemnation by a number of UPSE professors of the students' confrontation with Abad was execrable, especially amid their silence on the matter of widespread corruption and pork barrel. They even provided Abad with a venue to justify the Aquino regime's systemic corruption.

Meanwhile, Abad insinuated that the university budget which is currently being deliberated in Congress would be adversely affected should the UP administration fail to take action against the students.

AB

# Demolition in relocation sites

"Sufficient budgets for mass housing, not demolition!" cried urban poor protesters who gathered in front of the National Housing Authority (NHA) office in Quezon City in the first week of September. Instead of receiving assistance in the maintenance of tenement buildings serving as relocation sites, residents of the Katuparan Housing Project in Vitas, Tondo, Manila are being threatened anew with demolition.

The residents had been relocated to the site in 1991 when their dwellings were razed to give way to the expansion of North Harbor in Tondo. For years, they made do with the run-down and deteriorating buildings and repaired them at their own expense, even if it was the NFA's obligation to maintain the housing project.

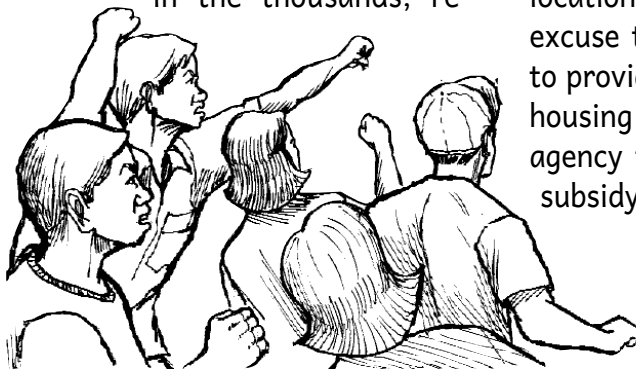
In January-February, the Manila Office of the Building Official conducted a series of inspections and claimed that 12 out of the 17 buildings at the site were unfit for human habitation. But a rebound hammer test later conducted by the Bureau of Research and Standards determined that the building foundations were strong and only needed rehabilitation in order to maintain sanitation standards.

Not long after, however, the residents were given notice by the Manila Department of Engineering and Public Works to vacate their dwellings because they were allegedly beyond repair.

In a dialogue with the NHA, angry mass leaders charged that since 2008, they had been requesting funding for the rehabilitation of the buildings, but these were all ignored by the housing agency. The residents are concerned because they have been left with no alternative housing and livelihood.

The urban poor residents of Katuparan Housing Project were joined at the dialogue by resi-

dents of Northville, another relocation site straddling the cities of Caloocan and Valenzuela and some towns in Bulacan province. The Northville residents, who are in the thousands, re-



counted their abject living conditions and lack of livelihood at the relocation site. They are also victims of demolition, having been driven from their communities to give way to the anomalous ₱9-billion Northrail project which aimed to reconstruct the railway line from Manila to Pampanga. The project was eventually cancelled.

The Northville relocatees demanded the ₱35,000-livelihood assistance pledged by the NHA in exchange for their voluntary relocation. The NHA gave the lame excuse that what they promised to provide was not livelihood but housing assistance. The housing agency further claimed that the subsidy came in the form of a reduction in the residents' housing amortization from ₱175,000 to ₱140,000. **AB**

## 1,000 Yolanda victims hold march-rally

More than a thousand calamity victims staged a march-rally in Ormoc City, Leyte on September 8, ten months after the devastation wrought by typhoon Yolanda. The victims brought placards stating their demand for ₱40,000 in immediate cash assistance and their calls for justice for the tens of thousands killed in the disaster.

They also exposed the real plight of the people throughout Eastern Visayas. Contrary to the Aquino regime's claims, many of the victims have yet to receive any assistance from the government. Adding to their suffering is the widespread hunger and the absence of a comprehensive plan by the national government for their rehabilitation.

They likewise demanded justice for the killing of Jefferson Custodio and other members of People Surge-Leyte who have suffered state repression. Custodio, an aid worker, was gunned down on August 21 in Carigara, Leyte by suspected 19th IB elements. More than a thousand people joined a protest action during Custodio's burial.

Meanwhile, the National Democratic Front in Eastern Visayas issued a statement condemning the extrajudicial killing of Las Navas, Northern Samar councilor Nelson Mercader because of his opposition to militarization. **AB**

## Church, local gov't call for SOMO

Church people and a number of officials of the local reactionary government have called on the Aquino regime and the AFP to order a suspension of offensive military operations (SOMO) in Bukidnon province to pave the way for the release of two prisoners of war held by the New People's Army (NPA).

According to Sen. Teofisto Guingona Jr. who chairs the Senate Committee on Peace and Order, he has written a letter to Aquino and defense secretary Voltaire Gazmin requesting for a SOMO.

The prisoners of war are Pfc. Marnel Tagalungon Cinches and Pfc. Jerrel Hapay Yorong, both from the 8th IB. They were captured by the NPA on August 22.

According to Ka Alan Juanito, NPA spokesperson in North Central Mindanao Region, they will no longer be subjecting the prisoners to the normal process of investigation and revolutionary justice as a goodwill measure to advance the resumption of peace negotiations between the NDFP and the Government of the Philippines.

Juanito called for a SOMO in San Fernando, Cabanglasan, Malaybalay City, Impasug-ong, Manolo Fortich and Malitbog in Bukidnon; and in Claveria, Balingasag and Gingoog City in Misamis Oriental. The NPA will immediately reciprocate with its own SOMO and ensure the prisoners' release. **AB**

## 9 military actions launched in NCMR

Eight firearms were seized, a soldier killed and at least seven others wounded in a series of military actions launched by Red fighters of the New People's Army (NPA) in North Central Mindanao Region from August 21-30. The NPA suffered zero casualties in these firefights.

The arms seizures consisted of three cal .22 rifles, a cal .45 pistol and four shotguns.

Two soldiers of the 52nd Engineering Brigade were wounded when an NPA unit used command-detonated explosives (CDX) on the dump truck the military was riding in Barangay Can-ayan, Malaybalay City on August 22.

The day before, a soldier was killed when an NPA team opened fire at the 8th IB detachment in Barangay St. Peter, Malaybalay City.

On August 26, at least two elements of the Philippine Army Special Forces were wounded after Red fighters raided the Del Monte Pineapple Plantation packing plant in Barangay Silipon, Libona, Bukidnon.

The military unit serves as Del Monte's protector.

The day after, an NPA unit harassed a platoon of paramilitaries belonging to the Alimaong group that was conducting patrols in Mamatu, Barangay Misamis

nalwang, Claveria, Misamis Oriental, inflicting an undetermined number of casualties.

On August 28, the NPA disarmed Mr. Benhur, an illegal logger in Sitio Bugta, Barangay Ginabsan, Buenavista, Agusan del Norte. Seized from him was a cal .22 rifle equipped with a telescope, a cal .45 pistol, ammunition for an M16 rifle and two military uniforms.

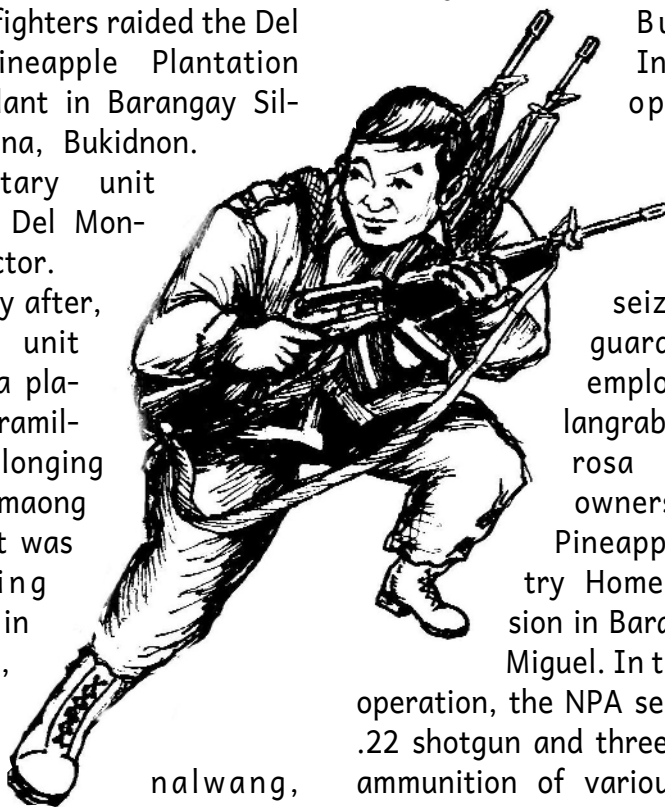
On August 29, the military suffered undetermined casualties in an attack by an NPA team on the Philippine Army-Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary (SCAA) detachment in Barangay Comota, La Paz, Agusan del Sur.

On August 30, two disarming operations were launched by Red fighters in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon.

In the first operation, three shotguns were

seized from guards in the employ of the langrabber Villarosa family, owners of the Pineapple Country Home Subdivision in Barangay San Miguel. In the second

operation, the NPA seized a cal .22 shotgun and three boxes of ammunition of various caliber from (ret.) Colonel Quaiwit as punishment for using his weapon to terrorize residents of nearby communities. **AB**



# AFP pullout from Abra demanded

**G**rowing numbers of sectors are calling for the pullout of the Philippine Army 41st IB from Lacub town in Abra. The 41st IB's brutal operations in the course of its implementation of Oplan Bayanihan have caused tremendous suffering to civilians. The military's most heinous crimes to date in the area are the murders of two civilians, Engr. Fidela Salvador and Novel Viste.

Salvador was an official of the Baguio City-based Cordillera Disaster Response and Development Services (Cor-DisRDS). As a consultant, Salvador monitored the Philippine Tropical Cyclone Emergency Response Project under Cor-DisRDS in Lacub. She was killed by soldiers conducting operations on September 5. In a statement released by the AFP on September 11, the military claimed that Salvador was an NPA member and even had a rifle strapped to her body.

Viste, on the other hand, was among 24 civilians forced by the 41st IB to serve as human shields in a military operation on September 5. The soldiers eventually released the civilians except for Viste and Nicasio Asbucan. Viste's body was found the day after, while Asbucan was surfaced by the soldiers and transferred to the custody of the Lacub police chief on September 7. Asbucan said the soldiers ordered him to say that Lanag, Lacub barangay chairman Jay-ar Balaoag was an NPA member and that he was responsible for gunning down Viste.

Fascist soldiers have been perpetrating many hu-

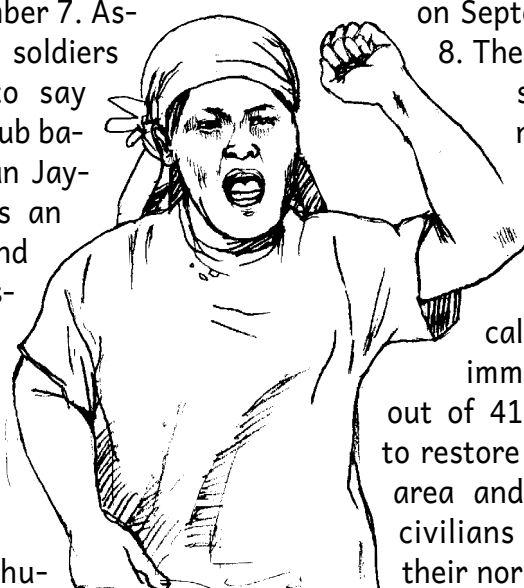
man rights violations and abuses against residents of the area. Military operations conducted without letup have also ruined the people's livelihoods.

On September 5, soldiers positioned at Sitio Bantugo, Poblacion, Lacub opened fire at the direction of Talampac Proper, Pacoc, prompting six families from Sitio Pacoc to leave their homes and seek refuge in other houses. Some peasants were also forced to spend the night in their farms.

Small miners in the area have been obliged to stop their livelihood since September 4. For their security, the residents of Barangay Talampak, Poblacion and Guinguinabang have enforced their own curfew from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The 41st IB's operations also forced the Bantugo Elementary School and High School and the Our Lady of Guadalupe High School to suspend classes on September 5 and 8. The military had set up camp near these schools.

Human rights advocates are calling for the immediate pullout of 41st IB forces to restore order in the area and enable the civilians to resume their normal lives. **AB**



# CPP assails Palparan's transfer to Fort Bonifacio

**T**he Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and various other organizations assailed the order transferring (ret.) Gen. Jovito Palparan from the Bulacan Provincial Jail to the AFP Custodial Center in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City. The order was issued by the Bulacan Regional Trial Court Branch 14 on September 16.

The CPP called Palparan's transfer to the AFP Custodial Center a "homecoming" and added that it was a "grave insult to the thousands victimized by military abuses committed by the soldiers and paramilitary forces he commanded."

The CPP charged that Palparan was bound to enjoy even more liberties and special treatment under his military custodians. Palparan's homecoming at the AFP is but the latest of the special privileges granted to him by the Aquino regime since his "arrest" on August 12.

The CPP is aware that the Filipino people look towards the revolutionary system as the only option to achieve their quest for justice for all the abuses committed by General Palparan and his men.

The CPP added that General Palparan has rightfully been indicted before the people's courts for his direct responsibility for scores of murders and abductions as well as grave violations of international humanitarian law.

The CPP stressed that the standing order for General Palparan's arrest remains in effect and will be carried out at an opportune time. **AB**



# The "Lumad manifesto" is an AFP concoction

The AFP, Alamara paramilitaries and the local government of Kapalong, Davao del Norte forced Lumad leaders from communities along the Davao del Norte-Compostela Valley-Agusan del Sur tri-boundary to sign a bogus manifesto declaring the "autonomy" of the Lumad people against the revolutionary movement.

On September 1-2, Lumad leaders in the area were invited to a meeting but were not informed of the agenda. They were taken aback when a computer-printed statement was circulated by Alamara chief Larris Mansaloon condemning the Lumad's communal farms, and claiming that these were being maintained by the New People's Army (NPA) to force the minorities to plant food for them. The manifesto distorted the fact that the communal farms have been instrumental in improving the Lumad's food production and livelihood after their devastation by typhoon Pablo in 2012 and the severe neglect they suffered in the hands of the reactionary government.

Everyone who attended the meeting and signed the manifesto was also automatically considered an Alamara member. The signatories included victims of militariza-

tion who could not refuse, fearing retaliation by Alamara.

Meanwhile, the long-term terrorist presence of the 60th, 68th and 46th IB in the area has also prevented the Lumad from working their farms.

The AFP is scrambling to obliterate the gains of Lumad communities in advancing production. Worse, through the Alamara, the AFP is using the Lumad masses to destroy their unity and fight the revolutionary movement.

The National Democratic Front in Southern Mindanao Region called on the Lumad and peasant masses to defend their hard-won gains and their ancestral lands from the onslaught of the military and its stooges from Alamara and the local reactionary government. The NPA will likewise intensify its tactical offensives against the enemy to bring people's war to a higher level. AB



## Rights groups call for release of ailing political detainees

Human rights advocacy groups continued to demand the release of 53 ailing political detainees languishing in jails all over the country in the face of the recent death of another political prisoner at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa City. The Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (SELDA) and HUSTISYA announced the death of political prisoner Benny Barid at 11 a.m. on September 18 at the NBP hospital where he had been confined for the past three years.

Barid had long been unable to walk due to "chronic asthmatic bronchitis with emphysema." His fellow political detainees had taken charge of procuring the medicines he needed.

Barid was first imprisoned during the Marcos dictatorship but was released in 1986. Slapped with a trumped-up charge of "illegal possession of firearms," he was forced to surrender in 2006 after the military took his child hostage.

The rights groups reiterated their demand for the release of elderly and ailing political prisoners since Barid is the second political prisoner to die under detention. Last year, Alison Alcantara, 55, died of "pneumonia, sepsis and fatal arrhythmia" at the Philippine General Hospital. SELDA and HUSTISYA had brought Alcantara to the PGH after he lost consciousness at the NBP Hospital.

SELDA and HUSTISYA are challenging Benigno Aquino III to release 53 ailing detainees out of 504 political prisoners nationwide. AB

# Obama declares new war in Middle East

**O**n September 18, the US Senate approved Pres. Barack Obama's bid to directly fund, arm and train Syrian forces fighting the anti-US Assad government.

The measure is but the latest in a long record of direct US intervention and aggression in Syria and the entire Middle East.

Obama invoked his previous declaration of war against a group called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (also known as ISIS or IS) to push for a resolution calling for armed intervention in Syria.

In a speech on September 11, the 13th anniversary of the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, Obama revived the "war against terror" to justify a renewed military campaign in the Middle East.

Aside from providing weapons to the armed group fighting ISIS, the US will also be conducting bombing raids on "opposition centers" and extra-judicial killings of ISIS leaders. This is no different from his actions in Pakistan, Afghanistan and other areas where the "war against terror" has been

waged. In these countries, thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of communities destroyed in relentless bombing raids on cities and basic civilian facilities.

ISIS is one of the armed groups that emerged after the US invasion of Iraq and the ouster of its president Saddam Hussein in 2003. It aims to establish a new territory along the Syrian-Iraqi border in order to control the area's oil resources. ISIS, which used to be called Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) is led by two former generals of the Hussein regime. It demands the expulsion of American troops.

AQI segued into ISIS in 2010 and concentrated on building its forces in Syria by forging an alliance with Jabhat al-Nusra. The latter, which led efforts to oust the Assad regime in 2013, received funding from the US and its known allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

ISIS declared the formation this year of an Islamic State on territory under its control that straddles vast portions of Syria and Iraq. **AB**