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EDITORIAL

Duterte's counterinsurgency will fail

Like a broken record, Duterte has repeatedly declared that his regime will crush the New People's Army (NPA). Recently, he threatened anew that "something big will happen" amid the failures of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) focused and sustained military operations in the countryside.

Instead, the all-out war under the DSSP Kapayapaan and AFP-PNP Joint Campaign Kapanatagan are pushing millions to take the path of militant and armed struggle.

Overall, no unit of the NPA has been crushed since Duterte ended peace talks between his regime and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The AFP is merely fooling itself in bragging that it has "recovered" NPA territories (which is doubly ridiculous considering that Duterte claims the NPA has no

territory). The AFP and Duterte know very well that NPA guerrilla units are fluid and can base wherever in the vast countryside. Across the country, the NPA continues to strive to deal blows against AFP units which relentlessly scour and unleash terror in the villages and communities.

Undoubtedly, Duterte will fail with his "whole-of-nation approach," patterned after the "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" of his US imperialist master's "counterinsur-

"Duterte's...", continued on page 2

NPA-Isabela seizes 14 firearms

FOURTEEN FIREARMS WERE seized by the New People's Army (NPA)-Isabela in an armed action against the Task Force Kalikasan (TFK) at Sitio Lagis, Barangay Sindun Bayabo, Ilagan City. Five pistols were confiscated during the operation. The TFK is under the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office and is actively supported by local police and military forces.

In connivance with the AFP and PNP, it spearheaded the demolition of houses and eviction of residents from Sitio Lagis in June. This has resulted in the displacement of around 56 families who have been farming in the area for three decades already.

Simultaneously, Red fighters confiscated an M14, AK47, seven pistols, ammunition and handheld radios from five police operatives when their convoy was stopped at

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gency" manual. Military "cooperation" with civil agencies cannot conceal the rise of the regime's militarism and fascism.

The AFP trumpets "whole-of-nation" in the forcible surrender of civilians, terrorizing their communities and destruction of their livelihood. "Whole-of-nation" is also behind AFP coercion of local government units to declare the NPA as "persona non grata" and ban "Leftist groups" fighting for people's rights. This maneuvers aim to subsume civilian institutions under the military, destroy the people's democratic organizations and replace these with those upholding fascist doctrines. Invoking "whole-of-nation," the military perpetrate relentless human rights abuses and put entire communities under their rule.

Duterte's "counterinsurgency" will fail because his regime is rotten to the core. His government is mired in deep and virulent internal contradictions because of his greed for funds and thirst for power. Rivalries

between criminal and bureaucrat syndicates are intensifying. His allies are openly fighting it out for bigger pork barrel allocations, kickbacks in government contracts, bureaucratic favors and shares in the loot of syndicates in corrupt agencies such as the Bureau of Corrections, Bureau of Customs and Bureau of Internal Revenue. His minions are also scrambling against one another for bribes of smuggling and illegal drug syndicates. His "anti-corruption drive" is also a big joke amid frequent exposés of big anomalies under his government.

Even "counterinsurgency" is a playground of corruption of Duterte's officials. Millions of pesos are pocketed as kickback by his generals and their contractors in procuring secondhand ships and helicopters, as well as arms, bombs and bullets for military operations. Generals steal the operational funds of their troops. They pocket the salaries of their men, especially of the peasants they conscript as CAFGU forces. They wring even the

funds for civilians forced to surrender and for hypocritical projects and social services. Corruption is most widespread in Mindanao, where brigades and battalions artificially beef up the tally of "surrendered" Red fighters.

But above all, the regime's counterrevolutionary scheme will fail because it confronts a party and people's army that is highly disciplined and deeply rooted among the masses. These are the strongest and most consolidated force resisting his tyranny and defending the people. They enjoy the trust and support of the people that is earned not through coercion and violence.

The Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army have withstood and defeated counterrevolutionary operations of reactionary regimes. Not only have these overcome the 14-year Marcos fascist dictatorship, it was also able to build and strengthen the people's army across the country. These were not crushed by the brutal suppression campaigns of the succeeding pseudo-democratic regimes.

The NPA is relentless in defending the people from the brutalities of the war primarily directed against civilians. At the same time, it continues to exert effort to frustrate the Duterte regime's campaign of suppression. The people's support for their Red fighters and Party cadres is boundless.

Across the country, the people are firmly defending their democratic organizations and the victories they have won over past decades. Agrarian and economic struggles continue to be mounted, while organs of political power are established. In areas where these organs and the people's government exist, the people exercise democracy among themselves to further broaden and strengthen their unity.

Just like under the Marcos dictatorship, the armed revolution and the people's resistance to tyranny is bound to strengthen. AB



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Foiled FMO in Agusan del Norte

The Armed Forces of the Philippines is covering up the failure of its focused military operation (FMO) at Mt. Hilong-hilong in North Eastern Mindanao last month to brag and save face. This was the statement of Ka Sandara Sidlakan, spokesperson of the New People's Army (NPA)-North Eastern Mindanao Region, on September 4.

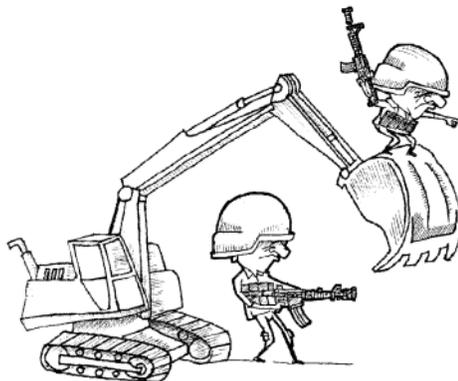
Mt. Hilong-hilong is located at the triboundary of Agusan del Norte, Surigao del Sur and Agusan del Sur. It is part of the Diwata mountain range and provides habitat for various species of fauna and flora.

The 402nd IBde launched its FMO from July 20 to August 15 using its 29th IB and 36th IB, together with elements of the Philippine National Police Caraga and CAFGU. The said operation served as a test mission of the 11th and 12th Scout Ranger Company. In sum, 1,000 troops of the AFP and PNP were deployed during the operation. Similar to other FMOs, the military also used attack helicopters, artillery and drones for support.

The operation covered the towns of Sibagat in Agusan del Sur, Carmen, Cantilan, Madrid and San Miguel in Surigao del Sur and Remedios T. Romualdez (RTR) in Agusan del Norte. Troops were also deployed in the cities of Butuan and Cabadbaran in Agusan del Norte. The said areas, particularly the town of Cantilan, is covered by destructive mining operations, including that of the Marcventures Mining Development Corporation has been permitted to operate in more than 4,799 hectares of forestlands. Its operation covers the central watershed which serves as a major source of water for irrigation and drinking across the region. Previously, the operation permit of the company has been suspended twice for damaging the environment.

The AFP bragged that its

troops was able to overrun NPA "camps" even though these were only former tactical bases or Lumad farm-lands. Actually, nine encounters en-



sued between AFP troops and NPA units from July 25 to August 12, wherein three soldiers were killed including a 29th IB lieutenant. Majority of enemy casualties were dealt in a demolition operation in the mountainous area of Barangay Mahaba, Cabadbaran City on August 12. A Red fighter was martyred

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an NPA checkpoint in an adjacent area.

Samar. Five soldiers of the 63rd IB were killed in an armed action of the NPA-Western Samar on September 2 at Sitio Rizal, Barangay Bulao, Basey. Another encounter between a military column and an NPA unit ensued at around 2 p.m. at Sitio Guinpondoan, Barangay Cogon in the same town.

The said enemy unit was then pursuing Red fighters who harassed a unit of the 63rd IB.

On August 30, two soldiers were killed while four others were wounded in a harassment operation of Red fighters at Purok 1, Barangay Mabini, Basey. In retaliation, soldiers indiscriminately strafed the area, wounding a 14-year-old child.

The 46th IB perpetrated the murder of the barangay chairman of Beri in April, forced surrender of farmers from Calbiga and Pinabacdao, and torture of three farmers in Basey.

Masbate. Four harassment operations were mounted by the NPA-Masbate on August 18 and 19 against the PNP and 2nd IB. On August 18, Red fighters harassed a police detachment in Barangay Bayombon, Masbate

City. On the next day, a soldier was killed in a sniping operation of the NPA against a detachment of the 2nd IB in Del Carmen, Uson. On the same day, the NPA also fired at PNP detachments in Guiwanon, Barangay Danao, San Jacinto, and in San Rafael, San Pascual.

Negros Occidental. Soldiers of the 79th IB were ambushed by the NPA-North Negros at Sitio Moreno, Barangay Paitan, Escalante City on August 31. Three soldiers were wounded in action. Consequently, the soldiers indiscriminately fired their guns even in areas where some of their troops were positioned. Around 10 soldiers were killed in the crossfire.

The 79th IB has been occupying Barangay Paitan for almost a year already under the guise of "peace and development," disrupting the livelihood and lives of residents. Soldiers are coercing civilians to surrender. Cases of illegal arrests and extrajudicial killings have also been reported in the area. The company-sized combat operation and increasing military presence in the barangays of Escalante has compelled residents to evacuate from their communities.

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Military intensifies intervention in schools

THE ARMED FORCES of the Philippines (AFP) has intensified its intervention in schools and universities across the country in compliance with the direction of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict which was established through Executive Order No. 70. These are patterned after the "whole-of-nation approach" counterinsurgency campaign and is a major component of the AFP's psywar operations (now dubbed "information operations") across the country.

It primarily aims to dismantle the democratic organizations of students and impose fascist ideology in campuses. To actualize this, soldiers (in uniform and armed) conduct so-called youth fora, information drives, trainings, youth leadership summits in campuses. These activities vilify democratic organizations such as Anakbayan, League of Filipino Students and even progressive parties such as the Kabataan Partylist and Bayan Muna. In such activities, the said organizations are maliciously tagged as "communist fronts" or "NPA sympathizers" to illegalize these and justify the violent suppression of its their members. The AFP presents malicious videos, paid "victims" and fake surrenderees.

Among those recently conducted were youth and student assemblies in Mindanao, including the youth leadership summit in Mt. Moriah Camp, Malaybalay and the military visit at the Bukidnon National

School of Home Industries. Similar assemblies were conducted by the 8th IB at the Bangcud National Highschool and Malaybalay National Highschool. The Bukidnon State University was most frequented by the AFP. On August 31, the AFP gathered around 280 youth participants from three barangays in Remedios Trinidad Romualdez, Agusan del Norte, in a forum wherein the military vilified progressive organizations. The 402nd IBde is also scheduled to conduct a "leadership development training" for Sangguniang Kabataan representatives from Butuan. The 3rd IB also assembled more than 150 youth from several barangays of Calinan, Davao City.

Similar assemblies are also conducted in Luzon and Visayas. The 303rd IBde conducted a forum at the University of St. La Salle Integrated School in Bacolod on August 23. The AFP also formally announced its plan to conduct a

"youth leadership summit" for highschool students in Negros as part of its so-called Community Support Program. In Northern Samar, 803rd IBde troopers conducted school visits to conduct an "indoctrination campaign." Among those they visited was the University of Eastern Philippines wherein a National Service Training Program seminar for students was held on August 31. As early as July, hundreds of youth have been assembled by AFP troops. The AFP also uses career guidance seminars for senior high school as venue to peddle malicious attacks and lies.

These psywar operations primarily target students and youth in provinces wherein focused operations are simultaneously being conducted by the AFP. The military has long been using this strategy in its operations, especially in far-flung villages.

On top of these psywar operations, cases of surveillance by AFP and PNP elements against student activists from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and University of Santo Tomas have been reported as well. In Samar, the PNP Regional Mobile Group interrogated members of The Pillar, student publication of the University of Eastern Philippines. In UP Pampanga, police operatives trooped to the campus after students conducted their protest in conjunction with the UP Day of Walkout and Action. The Rise for Education Alliance in University of San Carlos-Cebu also reported surveillance against their campus activities by police operatives. Meanwhile, the 3rd ID announced that it will deploy its troops at the West Visayas State University and other universities including UP Visayas wherein the League of Filipino Students and Anakbayan are purportedly active.

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during the encounters.

In retaliation, the AFP attacked civilian communities in barangays Mahaba and Puting Bato in Cabadbaran City. It bombed the said areas 15 times in four days. Bombs were also dropped in the areas using AugustaWestland helicopters. Huey helicopters were also used to evacuate wounded soldiers and deliver supplies for operating troopers.

Before and after the combat operation, the AFP militarized 15 barangays surrounding Mt. Hilong-hilong under the guise of "community organizing for peace and development" (COPD) operations. Using this as a pretext, soldiers besieged the barangays to coerce civilians to surrender, and intimidate and threaten them by repeatedly summoning them to barangay halls where troops are usually stationed. They often conduct house searches to coerce residents to "surrender" and pledge allegiance to them. In Barangay San Antonio in RTR, 29th IB troopers murdered farmer Roger Mandag on July 30. Earlier, he was repeatedly coerced by soldiers to surrender.

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Multitrillion budget for dictatorship

Budget for peace and development—this was how the US-Duterte regime described its proposed P4.1-trillion budget for 2020. This is far from reality as the multitrillion budget is bound to be corrupted and will be used to fund anti-people programs and projects, and to intensify fascism.

The proposed P4.1-trillion budget for 2020 is 12% higher than the P3.662-trillion budget for 2019. The budget increase was based on the government's projected 6.5-7.5% gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2020, a target that it will certainly fail to reach amid the production decline in various economic sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. In fact, the GDP declined to 5.5% which is the lowest in the past 17 quarters.

The said budget will primarily be funded by tax revenues. The Duterte regime estimates that tax revenues, including additional taxes imposed under the TRAIN law among others, will increase to P3.54 trillion. This is 12.3% higher than the P3.15-trillion tax revenue collection in 2019. However, the regime will still have borrow heavily as the revenue is short by P677 billion.

In sum, the government is set to loan up to P1.4 trillion in 2020. By the end of 2019, the national outstanding debt is expected to reach P7.853 trillion. By 2020, it is expected to peak at P8.767 trillion. Consequently, the net debt per capita of every Filipino is expected to balloon to P72,518 and P79,780 in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

The president and his minions' pork barrel

The proposed 2020 budget is riddled with anomalies. Of the P4.1 trillion-budget, only P2.36 trillion is allocated for government agencies and departments. The remaining P1.73 trillion will go to the "special purpose fund," or the lump sums in the budget dubbed the "presidential

pork barrel" as its utilization is under the personal control of the president. For every P10 that the government will spend in 2020, P4 can be considered as Duterte's personal funds.

Anomalous projects, which are commonly the source lawmakers' hefty kickbacks, have been overtly placed in the proposal. Part of this is the P972.5-billion allocation for the "Build, Build, Build" program to fund infrastructure projects already awarded to his favored bureaucrats and bourgeois compradors.

It also includes other projects which have long been used as milking cows by politicians such as road construction and "repair" projects. Among these are the proposed construction of a 338.3-kilometer road network, which is equal to the distance between Manila and Naga City. Another suspicious allocation is the P16.9-billion fund for the "preventive maintenance" of 955 kilometers of road networks (equal to the distance between Baguio City and Hongkong). The "preventive maintenance" will certainly serve as corrupt officials' lucrative source of kickbacks under the guise of road repairs.

Irrigation projects are another source of huge kickbacks. Around P36.3 billion is allocated for national and communal irrigation projects, while P2.2 billion is allocated for small irrigation projects. Majority of these projects are not delivered, and funds for these are often just pocketed by congressmen and local government officials. A large chunk of funds is also allocated for the construction of a national irrigation systems, even if

some of these have been long been opposed by the people. These include the P919-million Jalaur River Multipurpose Project Stage II, the P890-million Balog-balog Multipurpose Project in Isabela, the P800-million Lower Agno River Irrigation System Extension Project in Pangasinan, and the P500-million Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project Phase II in North Cotabato.

The 2020 budget proposal also includes the construction of the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project which is vehemently being opposed by minority peoples residing at the project site. It will be mainly funded using Chinese loans.

Funds for fascism

Aside from corruption, the Duterte regime has also increased its budget for intensified fascism.

The budget of the Philippine National Police further increased from P173.5 billion this 2019 to P184.9 billion in 2020. Part of this is the P3 billion for the recruitment of 10,000 new police operatives and P14.4 billion that will be used to help fill up 26,685 positions in the PNP.

Another P546 million is allotted for the PNP's implementation of the despised "war on drugs," and an additional P1.4 billion for agencies such as the Department of Interior and Local Government, which totals to P1.9 billion in Oplan Tokhang budget.

The Department of National Defense budget will also increase from P183.9 billion this 2019 to P189 billion in 2020. Approximately P25 billion will be used for the second round of procurement of war matériel under the Revised AFP Modernization Plan. Among those set to be procured by the AFP are additional secondhand vessels,

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radar and surveillance systems, attack helicopters and planes and other military equipment for counter-insurgency.

Another P522 million is allocated to various agencies for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict. The fund will be used to intensify the suppression and intimidation against civilian communities using the military and police's "whole-of-nation approach."

There are also projects which aim to enhance the reactionary state's intelligence capacity. Among these is the P20-million allocation for Project D.I.M.E. (Digital Imaging for Monitoring and Evaluation) which will be used for the procurement of drones, light detection and ranging (LIDAR) systems, and other equipment purportedly for monitoring the the delivery of projects in the countryside, but are actually for the intensification of surveillance in hinterland communities.

Aside from these projects, confidential and intelligence funds particularly for the Office of the President (OP) will also balloon to P4.5 billion in 2020. In sum, more than P8.28 billion is allocated to various agencies for confidential and intelligence expenses. This is the source of funds for government's various "black operations" such as maintaining death squads and perpetrating other heinous attacks against the people. AB

Victorious Monde Nissin strike

MONDE NISSIN WORKERS' second strike last August 27 was successful as the management agreed to negotiate with the Monde Nissin Labor Association-LIGA (MNLA-LIGA) regarding the retrenchment of 176 workers. The management agreed to compensate dismissed contractual workers a separation pay of not less than P100,000 each.

The MNLA first staged its strike on August 6 in which the management agreed to regularize its contractual workers. However, it reneged on its promise and cunningly terminated the contracts of the said workers.

The MNLA-LIGA stated that the struggle of the workers will not stop with their acceptance of separation pay.

In fact, Monde Nissin workers were among those who protested against low wages, contractualization and suppression during the Heroes' Day demonstration last August 16.

NutriAsia and Peerless Products Manufacturing Corporation workers also participated in the protest. AB

Widespread E-CLIP corruption

IN THE NORTH EASTERN Mindanao Region (NEMR), Maria Malaya reported that about P60,000 are pocketed by AFP officials for every civilian they are able to coerce to surrender. Reports from various barangays and communities across the region indicate that those coerced were promised to be given P65,000 each.

In truth, however, majority of them have not received even a single centavo. The maximum compensation received by some was only P5,000. There were cases wherein the P5,000 compensation was used as initial payment for motorcycle loans. Subsequently, "surrenderdees" are obliged to pay in full the P65,000 balance. Thus, AFP officials are able to rake in kickbacks in double. On top of funds they are able to pocket from the E-CLIP budget, they also serve as agents of motorcycle companies. Some surrenderdees were also coerced to train as CAFGU elements and were promised high salaries. In reality, however, they receive no salary and are only compensated with a few kilos of rice and a few pieces of noodles and canned sar-

dines.

Data obtained by the NDF-NEMR indicate that around P5.8 million in E-CLIP funds have been pocketed by AFP officials in the region. Meanwhile, P480 million supposedly for 8,000 "NPA surrenderdees" across Mindanao have also been corrupted by these officials.

E-CLIP has only aggravated the plight of the residents in the region. It is only used as a milking cow by corrupt AFP officials. The NPA-NEMR has long belied the fake surrender campaign of the butcher AFP. The military has only repeatedly used and paraded as "surrenderdees," its assets in barangays, former NPA members who have long laid low and civilians who were coerced to surrender in fear of being charged or killed by state agents. AB

Bakwit schools open in Quezon and Davao City

A BAKWIT SCHOOL (school for evacuees) held its opening of classes for the current academic year last September 2 at the University of the Philippines-Diliman in Quezon City. Around 50 Lumad students, their teachers and leaders participated in the activity.

Meanwhile, 155 students participated in the opening of classes in another Bakwit School at the UCCP Haran in Davao City. The Salugpongan administration said that they decided to open the Bakwit schools amid the Department of Education's refusal to revoke its suspension order against their schools.

Simultaneously, Lumad community leaders and students from the Save Our Schools Network staged a picket in front of the House of Representatives in conjunction with the conduct of Department of Education budget hearing last September 3. AB

State forces arrest NDFP consultant

JOINT ELEMENTS OF the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines illegally arrested Esterlita Suaybagueio, 60, in Cubao, Quezon City on August 23. Suaybagueio is a consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in its peace negotiations with the GRP. She was arrested based on a fabricated case of illegal possession of firearms and explosives, similar to charges against other NDFP consultants. She was also slapped with trumped up murder and frustrated murder charges.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) demanded Suaybagueio's immediate release as she is protected by the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) which was signed by the government of the Philippines and the NDFP. Suaybagueio's Document of Identification indicates that she is a consultant for Mindanao concerns.

Fidel Agcaoili, chief negotiator of the NDFP, condemned the arrest. He said this is yet another block to the possibility of resuming negotiations. The CPP and NDFP demanded that the trumped up charge against Suaybagueio and other detained NDFP consultants and staff be junked.

Meanwhile, attacks by Duterte's armed forces and his landlord cohorts in the countryside continue unabated.

Since May 23, 2nd IB troopers have been occupying 23 barangays in

the towns of Cawayan and San Fernando, Masbate. During the first week of September, the NPA-Masbate reported that the fascists have already entered four barangays in Uson. Human rights perpetrated by the 2nd are widespread in these villages. The said battalion is under the command of Lt. Col. Fabon.

In Bulacan, farmers at Sitio Compra, Barangay San Mateo in Norzagaray are subjected to continuous harassment by the Royal Mollucan Realty Holdings Inc. which is notorious for attempting to grab 75.5 hectares of farmlands that have been tilled by farmers since the 1960s. On September 2, its goons forcibly entered the residences of the members of the Samahang Magbubukid sa San Mateo. They also cut the power supply lines in the area, stole the residents' goats and destroyed their crops. AB

Duterte regime frees criminals

MORE THAN 1,700 heinous crime convicts have been released by the Duterte regime through the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA) Law.

The GCTA provides for the early release of inmates, including those sentenced to life imprisonment, as reward for their good behavior in prison.

This releases came under fire following a public outcry, especially that of the victims' family, against the alleged plan to release former Calauan Mayor Antonio Sanchez who was convicted over the rape-slay of Eileen Sarmenta and her companion Alan Gomez, and for killing father-and-son Nelson and Rickson Peñalosa.

The people were enraged even more with the direct endorsement of Sal Panelo, Duterte's minion, of Sanchez's release at the Bureau of Pardons and Parole. Panelo was one of Sanchez's defending lawyers during his trial.

To save face, Duterte dismissed Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) Commissioner Nicanor Faeldon. Previously, Faeldon was also dismissed as chief of the Bureau of Customs after being implicated in smuggling shabu.

Majority of those freed by the Duterte regime are rapists and murderers. Aside from Sanchez, it also freed four of the seven inmates convicted for the rape-slay of the Chiong sisters in Cebu in 1997.

The GCTA Law was enacted under the regime of Benigno Aquino III in 2013. AB

Palay farmgate price drops to P7

THE LOWEST FARMGATE price of local palay (unhusked rice) was pegged at P7/kilo last August from P22-24/kilo which was the highest price last year. This was after the influx of relatively cheaper imported rice into the local market. This has adversely affected the overall local agricultural production which has decreased by 1.27% during the 2nd quarter of the year and is the lowest in the last three years. The public, especially farmers, are aware that this is due to the rice liberalization law which Duterte signed last year.

Even then, farmers were already wary of the P10-billion subsidy which was allocated for those affected in the sector. According to Bantay Bigas, the amount is insufficient to support about 2.7 million affected farmers especially that only 10% of these are directly given to farmers in the form of loans. Farmers have long been buried in debt due to high production costs and land rent. Instead of addressing their plight, half of the said subsidy (P5 billion) will be used to procure farming machinery.

Simultaneously, the rice milling industry is gradually being destroyed. The Philippine Confederation of Grains Association stated that about 4,000 rice mills (40% of the total number of local rice mills) have gone bankrupt and been forced closed down due to the deluge of cheaper imported rice. In a congressional hearing last August 28, the Makabayan Bloc, together with farmers and rice millers, demanded to junk the rice liberalization law which is killing local rice production. AB

AFP harasses tobacco farmers

The Solidarity of Peasants Against Exploitation (Stop Exploitation) condemned Lt. Col. Charles Castillo of the 81st IB for tagging the organization as a legal front of the CPP-NPA. Castillo said this after a dialogue between the peasant group and the military in the office of Gov. Ryan Singson at the Ilocos Sur Capitol on August 8.

Stop Exploitation is demanding the direct distribution of the 15% excise tax on tobacco which was enacted in 1992 (RA 7171) and 1996 (RA 8240). The said tax is supposedly for the enhancement of the production capacity and livelihood of tobacco farmers. In 2016 alone, the reactionary government was able to collect up to P15.8 billion (15% of P105.4 billion) in tobacco excise taxes. The group, however, said that they are left with almost nothing. Since its enactment, only a handful receive a P15,000 subsidy, or worse, a sack of fertilizer.

Farmers demand subsidy, production incentives, and programs which will concretely address their plight including high production costs and low income. In addition, they also call for palay production support as most of them engage in it after harvesting tobacco.

A research by the National Democratic Front-Ilocos indicates that the 2016 fund is sufficient to

construct an irrigation system for 26,800 hectares of farmlands across the region, and procure several tractors and farming equipment. Around 38% of the fund is enough to subsidize an entire planting season and allow 37,000 farmers to cultivate an hectare of land each. There will still be a surplus which can be allocated for health and education services for peasant families.

In reality, however, almost 85% of the said fund are used to construct infrastructure projects that do not directly benefit farmers and are merely used as milking cows by local politicians and warlords in the region. In 2001, it was exposed that the Singson dynasty of Ilocos Sur corrupted about P224 million from the said fund. Similarly, Sen. Imee Marcos is also accountable for plundering P213 million from the fund when she was still governor of Ilocos Norte in 2011 to 2013.

Syndicate regimes have suc-

cessively been involved in plundering tobacco funds. In 2001, former president and hueteng lord Joseph Estrada was charged for asking from Gov. Luis Singson P130 million from the tobacco fund. Meanwhile, under the pretext of "protecting public health," Rodrigo Duterte imposed another increase in tobacco excise taxes last July 25. In January, the reactionary government was able to collect more than P20.5 billion in tobacco excise taxes.

Even local government officials of the reactionary government take part in malversing the fund. From 2016-2018, four local government units have failed to issue reports as to how they spent the P1-billion they were allocated respectively. The government was able to collect more than P41 billion in excise taxes during the said period.

Relatedly, Stop Exploitation demanded to raise the farmgate prices of tobacco at a standard price of P128/kilo, without classification. This is to reverse the underpricing (P28-P82/kilo) and bogus grading of Virginia, Burley and Native tobacco by traders and big companies in connivance with the National Tobacco Administration. AB

West Papuans' struggle for national liberation

Thousands of West Papuans have continuously staged massive demonstrations since August 17. They mounted their rallies in conjunction with the commemoration of the national independence day in Indonesia to demand national liberation and cessation (separation from Indonesia as an independent nation).

Instead of addressing their demands, the Indonesian government deployed an additional 1,200 military and police operatives in the province to violently suppress the demonstrations. On September 3, at least two Papuan students were killed when paramilitary elements attacked their dormitory. Similarly, six were killed, including a child, while more than a dozen were

wounded, when Indonesian troops strafed and dropped teargas grenades on the protesters in Deiya on August 28. These series of attacks are part of the continuing genocide campaign of the Indonesian state against Papuans.

History of foreign intervention

West Papua (formerly Netherlands New Guinea) was a part of the

Dutch East Indies (presentlyz Indonesia) which was colonized by the Netherlands since 1880. After recognizing Indonesia's independence in 1949, the Dutch government refused to let go of its hold over West Papua to ensure its economic interests in the region.

But in the 1960s, former US President John F. Kennedy plotted the transfer of West Papua to Indonesia in favor of the local ruling class in the latter. In 1969, a referendum was held wherein Papuans were supposedly allowed to vote for or against West Papua's integration

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to the republic of Indonesia. Indonesian soldiers handpicked 1,025 Papuans to participate in the referendum and coerced them to vote for integration.

The integration ensured the free entry of local and multinational mining and plantation companies and their plunder of West Papua's natural resources. Among these are the US-based Freeport and Australia-based Rio Tinto, companies that are notorious for destroying the environment. Japanese companies are also at the forefront in denuding the forests and depleting the natural gas (together with US companies) in the island. Meanwhile, big compradors and Indonesian capitalists are grabbing the ancestral lands of Papuans as sites

for large commercial plantations.

Decades-long struggle

The West Papuans's aspiration for self-determination and national liberation was clear from the very beginning. In 1965, they founded the Free Papuan Movement, an armed group of the New Guinea Raad, the West Papuan people's government which they established in 1961. In 2015, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, an organization of countries in the Oceania subregion, recognized the coalition of Papuan groups under the United Liberation Movement of West Papua.

To suppress the Papuan people's struggle, the province has been continuously placed under de facto martial law. With more than

45,000 Indonesian troops, it is considered the most militarized province in the country. Among those deployed here are Konstrand Commandos who were trained, armed, and funded by the US and Australia.

Intense militarization results in genocide and massive eviction of Papuans. Since 1969, more than 100,000 Papuans have been killed, while tens of thousands have fallen victim to other human rights violations.

In the face of worsening foreign intervention in their ancestral lands and suppression of their rights, the West Papua National Liberation Army continues on waging guerrilla warfare to achieve national liberation.

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