

EDITORIAL

# US military audacity under the Marcos puppet regime

**T**he brazen presence of thousands of American troops, along with their giant warships, jet fighters, cannons and all sorts of weapons all puts a spotlight onto the absence of genuine Philippine independence and how it is treated with contempt as a mere large US military base.

While in the Philippines, American soldiers enjoy extraterritorial and special privileges, much more than ordinary Filipinos. These were given them under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), unequal military agreements that favor the US.

Under the EDCA, the US was provided extensive "agreed locations" inside military camps of the AFP, for its exclusive use as military facilities and bases. The US uses these as docks, airports, fuel storage, personnel accommo-

dation, storage of weapons, vehicles and other war matériel. The US is allowed to use these locations "without rental or similar costs."

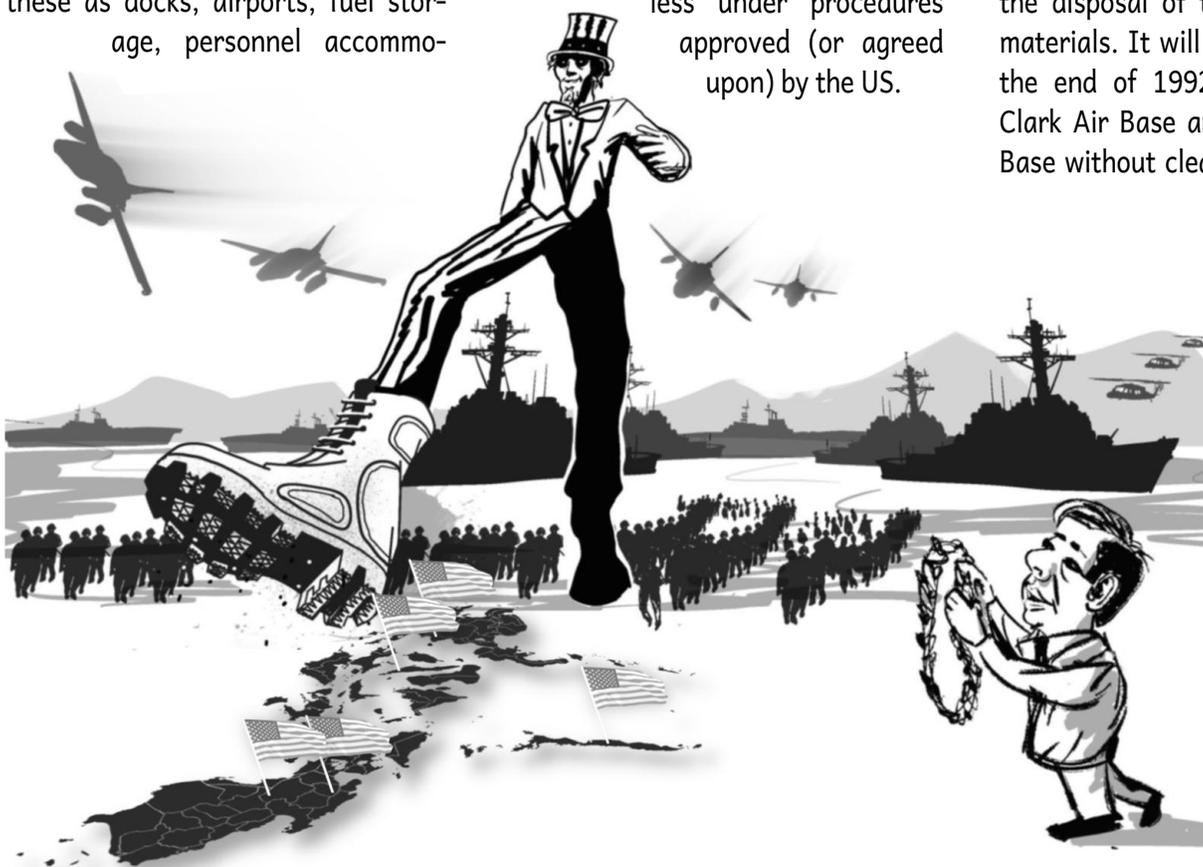
The US military exercises absolute control over these locations until these are "no longer required by the United States," meaning as long as it wants and deems necessary to use these locations. The Philippine government has no sovereignty or authority over these US military bases and facilities. These cannot be subjected to inspection unless under procedures approved (or agreed upon) by the US.

The US is also granted the right to use at any time public land and facilities such as roads, ports and airfields, particularly when moving or deploying equipment. Contrary to Philippine laws, the US is also given the right to establish its own telecommunications system and use "all the necessary radio spectrum" for free, a right Filipinos do not enjoy. In addition, the EDCA gives the US the privilege to use water, electricity and other utilities at rates similar to the Philippine government, which is below the fees paid for by ordinary Filipinos.

The agreement does not oblige the US to pay for damages to the environment that may be caused by the disposal of toxic or dangerous materials. It will be recalled that at the end of 1992, the US left the Clark Air Base and the Subic Naval Base without cleaning up their toxic

waste which poisoned the ground water, sea water and marine resources.

While in the Philippines, American soldiers enjoy a special legal status. By default, they are not covered by Philippine criminal or civil laws at a time while stationed in the country. For



the last 25 years, American soldiers involved in crimes (murder, rape, beatings, shooting and so on) have not been arrested, charged or made to face the courts, but were quickly sent home. Even in highly-publicized Subic Rape Case and the killing of Jennifer Laude, American soldiers who were found guilty were given the slip and returned to the US.

This 2023, at least 500 war games---military exercises in preparation for war---will be held by the US in the Philippines. This means every day throughout the year, American soldiers are in the Philippines to stir up and provoke war. These include the Balikatan exercises last April, the largest ever which saw 12,600 American troops swarmed the northern part of Luzon to display war prowess before China. All over, the US flies their jets fighters and helicopters, sails their carriers, and launch missiles and bombs that destroy the peace and environment. "Joint exercises" are being held to ensure the US will have operational control (which the US terms "interoperability") of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the event of a war. The US pushes the AFPs "modernization" to induce it to spend tens of billion pesos to buy surplus, second-hand or previous

generation weapons.

While trampling and lording over Philippine land, air and waters, the large presence of American soldiers is falsely depicted as indicator of US "iron-clad commitment" to the Philippines. American claims of defending the Philippines against the giant China is a tall tale. What the US, in fact, defends is its self-interest, the same self-interest that motivated it to annex the Philippines for half a century, and rule it as a semicolony since 1946 with puppet bureaucrats.

The military presence of the US in the Philippines is part of its strategy to surround its imperialist rival China and contain its further military and economic growth. The US relentlessly expands its military forces from East Asia, Southeast Asia to the Pacific islands, even in India, while goading and arm-twisting its military allies (including Japan, Australia, to the United Kingdom) to join naval operations in South China Sea on the pretext of "freedom of navigation." Under US geopolitical and military strategy, the Philippines is an important outpost because of its proximity to China. To China, the presence of US military forces in the Philippines is considered a threat to its security

and will surely be targets of armed reprisals once the US uses the country to launch a war against China.

Allowing increased military presence in the Philippines was used by the US Biden government as condition for extending more loans, investment as well as military assistance desperately sought for by the Marcos regime in past two visits to the US. In exchange for explicit surrender of territory to the US and allowing it to use the country as a military base and launching pad, the World Bank last June approved four loan packages amounting to \$1.14 billion, to bridge the Marcos regime's massive budget deficit. These loans are now used to push economic policies that further expand the interests of foreign capitalists and their bourgeois comprador and landlord partners, at the expense of the livelihood of the toiling masses and the average Filipinos.

The Marcos puppet regime is further downgrading the Philippines status as a US semicolony without genuine independence. More than 125 years of US control and domination is the fundamental reason why the Philippines is mired in crisis, remains backward, agrarian, non-industrialized, and cannot stand on its own feet. The US is further tightening its political, economic, military and cultural grip to advance its interests in the Philippines and throughout Asia.

The Filipino people should fight for the abrogation of the EDCA, the VFA, the Mutual Defense Treaty and all other unequal military agreements with the US. The Philippines has no real sovereignty as long as its dominated by US military power. The people must struggle to liberate the Philippines from US control and develop the country's capability to defend itself. This can only be achieved if the Philippines enjoys full economic and political sovereignty and genuine national independence.

AB

 <p>Vol LIV No. 14   July 21, 2023</p> <hr/> <p>Ang Bayan is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray, and English. Ang Bayan welcomes contributions in the form of articles and news items. Readers are encouraged to send feedback and recommendations for improving our newspaper.</p>	<h2 style="text-decoration: underline;">Contents</h2> <p><b>Editorial:</b> US military audacity under the Marcos puppet regime 1          NPA mounts harrassment and demolition ops 3          Oil prices increase again 3          Groups criticize enactment of Maharlika Bill 3          Protests 3          Marcos continues to ram jeepney phaseout 4          State forces illegally arrest three 5          Residents oppose Valenzuela, Cavite demolitions 5          6 individuals designated as "terrorists" 5          PH, favorite customer of criminal Elbit System 6          501st IBde, pests to the people of Cagayan 7          In short 8          Destructive mining expansion in Masbate 9          US provides Ukraine cluster bombs 10          Jollibee's low wages and abuse of workers 10</p>
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## NPA mounts harassment and demolition operations

THE NEW PEOPLE'S Army (NPA) units launched a series of harassment and demolition operations during the past two weeks.

In Barangay Das-agan, San Francisco, Agusan del Sur on June 27, Red fighters opened fire on the 41st Division Reconnaissance Company's operating troops at approximately 4:30 p.m. One soldier was killed in the said operation.

The NPA-Sorsogon drove away soldiers encamped for three weeks in the evacuation center and chapel of Barangay Calpi, Bulan, Sorsogon after firing shots at soldiers on July 6 at around 8:30 p.m. The soldiers scampered in fear and took cover in nearby houses. They used civilians as shields and fired indiscriminately in all directions. Another NPA unit followed this harassment operation by detonating an explosive at the fence of the 22nd IB camp in Barangay Calmayon, Juban on July 10.

A CAFGU element was killed when shot by the NPA-North Central Mindanao in Barangay Lawaan, Gingoog City, Misamis Oriental on July 7. A .45 calibre pistol was seized from him.



**Stop the bombings.** Human rights, peasant and national minority groups protested in front of Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City on July 17 to condemn and demand a stop to the aerial bombardment of their communities. Such bombings accompany countryside militarization that worsens the plight of farmers and indigenous people.

**Imminent RITM layoffs, opposed.** Health workers of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) protested on July 18 to demand salary increases, provision of delayed allowances and to express opposition to the planned abolition of the institution. According to them, this plan will cause mass layoffs, and carried out under the veil of the establishment of the Philippine Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

**Denounce fabricated charges of terrorism!** Human rights groups and students in Southern Tagalog gathered on July 6 at Sumulong Park in Antipolo, Rizal to condemn the AFP and the 59th IB for filing trumped-up charges of terrorism against four activists in the region. Before this, they also protested in front of the DoJ in Manila.

## Oil prices increase again

DRIVERS PROTESTED ON July 17, a week before Ferdinand Marcos Jr's State of the Nation Address, to condemn yet another series of oil price hikes. The increase occurred amid the regime's "rebranding" using the slogan "Bagong Pilipinas (New Philippines)."

Starting July 18, per liter prices of diesel rose by ₱2.10, gasoline by ₱1.90 and kerosene by ₱1.80. Price increases have become so frequent and common. The price of gasoline and diesel in Metro Manila is now almost ₱60 per liter, nearly ₱20 higher compared to their price at the end of 2021. Because of this, drivers are not at all relieved from the meager fuel subsidy doled out by the reactionary state.

Meanwhile, monopoly oil companies rake in extravagant profits. Petron earned ₱6.7 billion in revenues in 2022, up from ₱6.1 billion in 2021. Shell's revenues also rose to ₱4.1 billion in 2022, up from ₱3.9 billion in 2021. Meanwhile, Caltex opened 28 new gas stations nationwide last year.

## Groups criticize devious enactment of the Maharlika Bill

YOUTH GROUPS TROOPED to Mendiola in front of Malacañang to condemn Ferdinand Marcos Jr for his devious signing of the bill creating the Maharlika Investment Fund on July 18. Farmers held a separate protest in Quezon City.

Malacañang did not publicize the final version of the bill, which was "tinkered" weeks after it passed the Senate and Congress. Even some congressmen were not informed of its final content.

One of the controversial provisions of the bill is the use of the pension fund of millions of workers and government employees deposited in the GSIS and SSS. Although this was stricken off the Senate-passed version, the two institutions are still not prohibited to invest in the MIF in the future.

Marcos also said that some of his officials will not sit on the board of the Maharlika Investment Corporation (MIC) which will manage the fund. Nevertheless, the law stipulates that Marcos' finance secretary will sit as chair of the MIC board.

Bayan Muna and Tama Na (Taumbayan Ayaw sa Maharlika Fund Network Alliance) are preparing to file a petition before the Supreme Court to stop the law and rescue billions of public funds from corruption and abuse.

# Marcos continues to ram jeepney phaseout

The Marcos government did not "postpone" and instead is ramming through the jeepney phaseout plan. This despite Marcos Jr's promise made after the May transport strike to review the program. Nothing also came out from his promise to consult with drivers and operators who are instead being harassed by police.

In reality, the regime is relentlessly maneuvering to accelerate the removal of traditional jeepneys from roads. In the provinces, this scheme takes on different names.

Foreign capitalists and big local compradors behind the jeepney phaseout want to turn the country into dumping ground of "electric vehicles" (EV), or vehicles powered by electricity (instead of gasoline) stored in batteries. Colluding with the reactionary state, they speak of "environmental-friendliness" and "climate change mitigation" to justify the massacre of livelihood of small drivers and operators.

Among the biggest bourgeois compradors involved in "modernization" are the Aboitiz family that released COMET buses, Ramon Ang (San Miguel Corporation) who will open a \$500M EV battery plant in Dinagat Islands, and Ayala who partnered with Kia Motors for marketing imported electric vehicles.

Marcos signed Executive Order 12 last January to grant "tax breaks" or exempt EV importation from tariffs. These vehicles, supposedly "cleaner," will be used to replace traditional jeepneys. This order is supported in the National EV Roadmap which is already being

framed and implemented by the Department of Energy. Under this, foreign manufacturers can more freely and more openly sell EVs in the country.

Marcos is in collusion with imperialist countries and banks such as the World Bank (funded primarily by the US) and the Asian Development Bank (funded primarily by Japan) in implementing the pseudo modernization program in transportation. US imperialism is the main driver of this program in its push to claim a large share in the global electric vehicle market, alongside rising investments in "clean" energy production. In May, the US announced plans to invest \$5 billion in operations to extract minerals for the production of electric vehicles and other equipment.

The "pro-environment" stance of the Marcos regime and its foreign and local capitalist associates, who are, in fact, among the biggest environmental polluters, is utterly bogus. While investing in purportedly "clean energy," Aboitiz and San Miguel also operate the largest "dirty energy" plants that produce 54% of the

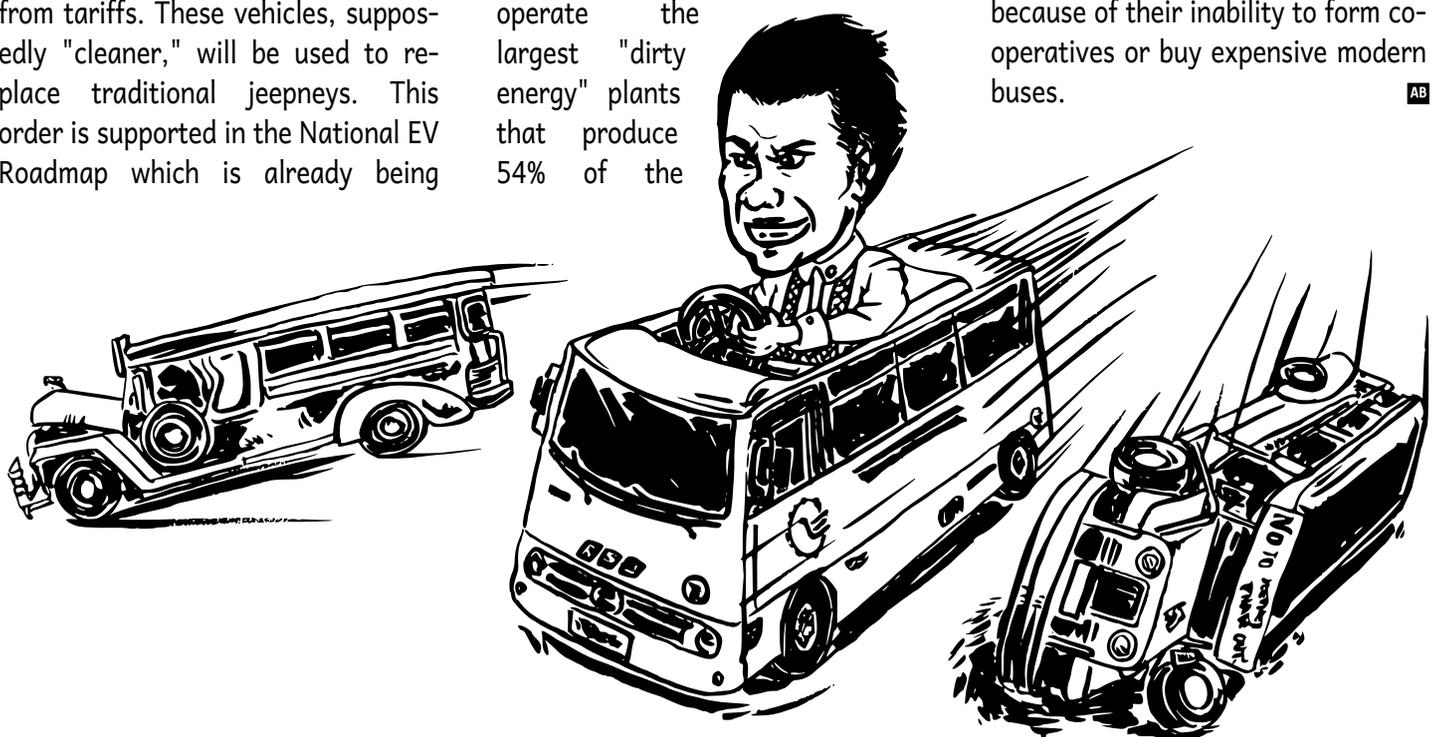
country's entire carbon emissions.

## Sidewiping jeepneys from roads

From the outset, drivers and operators have opposed the jeepney phaseout because this will massacre their source of livelihood through the "consolidation" of franchises and monopolization of jeepney and other public transport routes. In other areas, this is implemented under Local Public Transport Route Plan (LPTRP) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

In Davao City, the BRT is in full swing supported by Asian Development Bank. The ADB announced on June 29 its \$1 billion loan for the implementation of the Davao Public Transport Modernization Project. It is preconditioned on the importation of 1,100 buses from Japan replacing traditional jeeps on the city streets. The ADB also required a reduction of routes from 120 to 30. The ADB plans also include building 1,000 bus stops to be operated primarily by corporations that will contract-hire drivers.

Not less than 7,000 drivers in Davao City will lose their livelihood. Almost 6,000 drivers will be left stranded with only 1,000 buses running under the project. Small operators will also lose their franchises because of their inability to form cooperatives or buy expensive modern buses.



## State forces illegally arrest three

Three individuals were arrested by state forces on fabricated charges on July 12 in Quezon and Romblon provinces. Meanwhile, cases of harassment against peasant associations and local media were recorded in Negros and Leyte in the past week.

Two activists were arrested by the 85th IB on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives on July 12 while conducting community research in Atimonan, Quezon. Health worker Miguela Peniero and youth volunteer Rowena Dasig were arrested in Purok Banaba, Barangay Caridad Ibaba.

The two were in the community to investigate the impact of the planned cycle gas turbine power project and liquefied natural gas terminal plant in the area. Locals fear that the project, to be built by Atimonan One Energy, Inc. (A1E), a subsidiary of Meralco PowerGen Corp, will severely affect coconut farmers and fishermen in Atimonan town.

Fabert Reyes was arrested on July 12 in Barangay Poblacion,

Sibuyan Island, Romblon on 19 charges of libel. Reyes strongly opposes mining in Sibuyan Island.

**Harassment.** The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines reported last July 14 that three journalists were harassed by police in Barangay Jones, Pastрана, Leyte. Lito Bagunas, Noel Sianosa and Ted Tomas were reporting on a case of land grabbing in the area when police officer Rhea Mae Baleos drove them away. While they were being forced to leave, the three heard gunshots.

In Negros Occidental, six associations of farmers, farm workers and fishermen in four barangays of Cauayan town reported intimidation and harassment by 15th IB and 47th IB soldiers since July 10. The soldiers ordered the leaders



and members of the associations to gather for a "meeting."

The associations are based in the barangays of Toyum, Caliling, Man-uling and Guiljungan. Soldiers went from house to house and interrogated residents, particularly the associations' leaders.

**Physical assault.** A series of mauling cases were recorded in Barangay Budlasan, Canlaon City, Negros Oriental on July 6. The 62nd IB accused them of links with the people's army.

Soldiers mauled Edward Sandot, Budok Sandot, Christopher Sandot, Joselito Patulada and Roberto Francisco who come from different sitios in the said barangay.

### Residents oppose Valenzuela and Cavite demolitions

URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES opposed two demolition operations this month.

In Barangay Veinte Reales in Valenzuela, residents of Block 6 defended their barricades on July 12 against the combined forces of the PNP and Valenzuela local government who carried out a violent demolition of more or less 400 houses in the area. Some residents and their supporters were injured from the clashes.

The demolition was illegal with homes torn down by a demolition team that carried no documents. According to residents, there are still pending hearings to investigate the grounds for evicting them their homes of 25 years. During this entire period, the Valenzuela local government ignored their request to fix their situation. No relocation site has been prepared for those to be evicted who will be compensated a mere ₱9,000 if they vacate the area.

Meanwhile, 700 residents of Viva Homes Subdivision in Dasmariñas City, Cavite conducted a protest-vigil last July 16. They face imminent eviction due to the dispute between the three contractors of the subdivision.

### 6 individuals arbitrarily designated as "terrorists"

VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS STAGED protests on July 11 at the Commission on Human Rights to condemn the Anti-Terrorism Council's (ATC) arbitrary designation of six individuals as "terrorists" under the Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL). They demanded the repeal of the draconian law.

The six are Windel Bolinget, Sarah Abellon-Alikes, Jen Awingan, and Steve Tauli, all leaders of the Cordillera People's Alliance, and Jovencio Tangbawan and May Vargas-Casilao. The designation was made public on July 10.

The four CPA leaders were part of the so-called "Northern Luzon 7" who were acquitted last May on fabricated charges of rebellion filed against them in January.

In the ATC's resolution, the Anti-Money Laundering Council was tasked to investigate and freeze the bank accounts and assets of the accused. The six are in addition to 61 previously designated as "terrorist individuals" by the ATL.

# Philippines, favorite customer of the criminal Elbit System

Billions of pesos in Filipino people's money have been cornered by the Elbit Systems, an Israeli company, which is one of the main weapons suppliers for the supposed "modernization" of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The latest contract includes two old ATR 72-600, commercial planes that will be refurbished for surveillance and combat operations. The contract is worth \$114 million or ₱3.135 billion per airplane.

Elbit is the largest Israeli company directly involved in the genocide of the Palestinian people and is considered a war criminal. Since 2007, this company has been on the list of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement led by the Palestinian people and supported by many groups in the world. This movement calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israeli companies involved in Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, and maintenance of the West Bank wall that imprisons Palestinians in what is known as "biggest prison" in the world.

Israel is the main ally and partner of the US in the Middle East. It is the biggest recipient of US military aid in the world, in violation of the 1982 United Nations Security Council resolution that called for a comprehensive military embargo against the country. The military industries of the two countries are closely linked.

Consistently a puppet of the US military, the AFP is a "favored customer" of old and refurbished Elbit weapons. Most of the contracts awarded during then Duterte regime are being continued by the current Marcos regime.

Among the military equipment the AFP purchased or asked refurbishing from Elbit are the following:

- Sabrah tanks to form the 1st Tank Battalion Armor Division to base in Tarlac. The contract for this amounts to ₱9.4 billion. General Dynamics Land Systems, an Ameri-

can company, manufactures the tanks.

- M125A2 tanks which arrived in December 2021. Some were deployed to the 76th IB in Barangay San Luis, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro; to the 3rd ID for military use in Central and Western Visayas; and to the 4th Mechanized IB in Pantao Ragat, Lanao del Norte.

- Merkava IV-based armored bridgelayers worth \$27.7 million delivered in July 2022. Merkava bridgelayers are tanks built by private US military contractor Leonardo DRS, and repaired by Elbit.

- Autonomous Truck Mounted howitzer System (ATMOS) worth \$47 million or ₱215.41 million each. They are deployed in Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Maguindanao, and in the 3rd ID in Western Visayas. The AFP formed and trained the 10th Field Artillery Battalion in 2022 to operate them.

- M-17 towed howitzers worth ₱410.85 million and deployed to various battalions including the 7th Field Artillery Battalion in Butuan City.

- THOR and other drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and their ground stations worth \$163 million (₱8.965 billion).

- UAVs worth \$175 million. These consist of nine Hermes 900 and four Hermes 450 which have been flown since August 2019.

- contract for the installation of remote controlled weapons sys-



tems on 100 M-113 armored personnel carriers. These APCs, provided by the US in 2014, were used in the AFP siege on Marawi City in 2017.

Apart from these, Elbit is involved in the construction of the Armor Maintenance Depot of the Philippine Army at Camp O'Donnell in Barangay Santa Lucia in Capas, Tarlac. Elbit-refurbished armor and mechanized vehicles of the AFP will be stored here. In April, the military's "installation battalion" evicted hundreds of farmers and residents of Barangay Santa Lucia and Barangay Lawy to make way for the expansion of the said military camp.

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# 501st IBde pesters the people of Cagayan

The National Democratic Front (NDF)-Cagayan recently refuted the 501st IBde's claims of "victory" against the revolutionary movement in the region in the first half of 2023. They said the trophies boasted of by the brigade only brought widespread harm to the people. These were won through violence, an iron-fist policy and sowing of terror and fear among the peasant masses and minorities in the countryside.

The latest of these grave human rights violations include the brigade's spearheading of focused military operations from February to May this year. At the drumbeat of the 5th ID and Task Force Tala, it laid siege on East Cagayan using 2,000 combined military, paramilitary and police forces.

The declared aim of the operation was to "completely decimate" the "remaining Red fighters" in the province in the first half of the year. This is part of the wishful thinking of the rotten state to crush the revolutionary movement, as well their security support for Balikatan 2023, the biggest war exercises launched during the first quarter of the year. This is also part of the US strategy to turn Northeast Luzon into a launching pad for war and draw the country to its war preparations against China. This will certainly bring double suffering for the people of Cagayan, who are likely the first to bear China's reprisal.

Military forces were mainly deployed to Baggao where people are carrying out militant actions against usury, as well as in the foothills of Northeast Cagayan where a US radar base was said to be established under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The battalions of the 501st IBde were used to sow terror in the towns of Lal-lo, Buguey, Sta. Teresita, Gonzaga and Sta. Ana.

In three months, at least 30 bombs, rockets and artillery shells were released near communities and farms. This resulted in the destruction of people's livelihood and caused fear especially among children and elderly who since had trouble sleeping due to trauma.

Within this same period, the 501st IBde and Provincial Task Force-Elcac in Cagayan declared the "surrender" of 21 people along with alleged weapons. NDF-Cagayan refuted the claim and said that of the 21 who "surrendered",

five were declared captured, five were recycled or have long left the people's army but are still being paraded repeatedly. Others were hunted despite having long left the army and should be considered civilians under international humanitarian laws. Majority of them suffered from threats and intimidation, while others were outrightly deceived, to force their "surrender" despite being no longer part of the people's army.

In April 2022, elements of the brigade summarily killed Saturnino Agunoy (Ka Peping) and two medics Augusto Gayagas (Ka Val) and Mark Canta (Ka Uno) along the road in Piat, Cagayan. The three were unarmed and in no position to fight, especially the two senior citizens, Agunoy and Gayagas.

## From where did the 501st IBde originate?

The reconstituted 501st IBde was deployed to Cagayan and adjacent Apayao in October 2020 after six months of training. According to the 5th ID, the brigade's mother division, the main objective of reactivating the brigade is to "relate with local governments and agencies in the two provinces working with the National Task Force-Elcac and ending the insurgency." The brigade's headquarters is located in Lal-lo, Cagayan, which is among the US' "EDCA locations."

Under the brigade is the 17th IB and 77th IB, which served as combat forces in Mindanao. BGen. Ferdinand Melchor C. dela Cruz currently serves as its commander. He was appointed to the post on February 23 and on July 3 was promoted along with 15 other generals. Dela Cruz is part of the Philippine Military Academy Tanglaw-Diwa Class of 1992 and previously served in the 5th ID as its intelligence officer. AB



**₱187  
MILLION**

wasted by the Department of Tourism on the anomalous **"Love the Philippines"** campaign using free videos from the internet which were not shot in the Philippines.

**17.1  
MILLION**

Filipinos working "part-time" in May, 1.4 million more than last year.

**₱233.7  
million**

additional expenses of **Sara Duterte** as vice presidente in 2022, **₱125 million** of which were **"confidential funds."** This is 32% higher than the budget allocated for her.

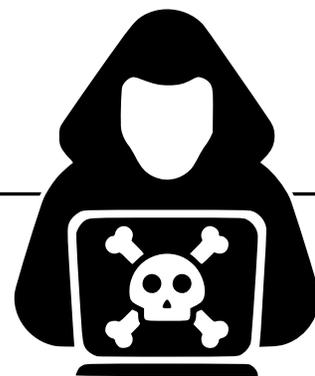
**₱7.8  
MILLION**

price of a vehicle anomalously purchased by the **Philippine Coast Guard** for its commander. In addition, **31 other vehicles** each costing **₱1.9 million** were bought for its other officials.

**70%**

**income drop of fisherfolk in Scarborough Shoal since the Duterte regime**

due to its incompetence to stop the increasing numbers of Chinese vessels in the area and assert the arbitral ruling that it is a common fishing ground for Filipinos and Chinese.



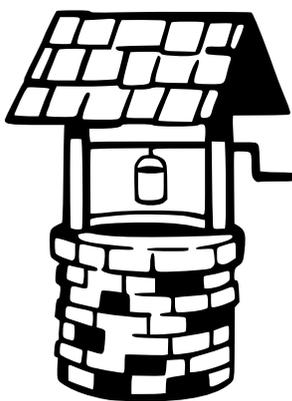
**152%**

increase in cybercrimes from January to June this year, compared with the same period last year.

**This proves the failure of the anti-privacy and repressive SIM Card Registration Law.**

**1.105  
million liters**

or 40% of clean water from **Angat Dam** is wasted everyday due to leaks in the pipes of Maynilad Water Services, Inc.



**5+ million**

**Bicolanos rely on wells and 187,673 lack access to clean water.**

They will be among the people who will suffer from the upcoming El Niño.

# Destructive mining expansion in Masbate

**F**ilminera Resources Corporation (FRC) is again pushing to expand its mining operations in the mountainous areas of Milagros, Uson and Mobo towns in Masbate. The company will expand in the aforementioned towns after its Masbate Gold Project plundered gold and damaged the environment in Aroroy town.

Accompanying the expansion are intensified military operations and deployment of armed forces to protect the company and its facilities. At least 900 armed forces (300 SCAA, 300 FRC private forces and 300 Blue Guards) serve as company guards.

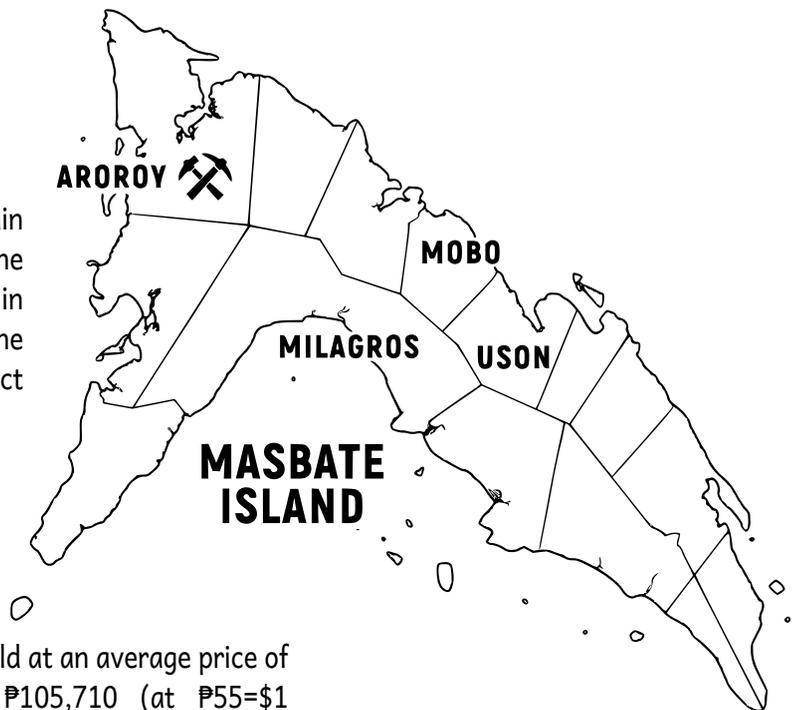
Recently, attacks against those opposing the FRC have been recorded. These include the attempted murder in May of Rodolfo Igot, a leader in Barangay Barag, Mobo, and the killing of farmer Randy Mahinay last June in Milagros.

## Foreign plunder

The FRC, which has the largest gold mining operation in the country, is 40% owned by the Canadian company B2Gold and 60% owned by the Filipino company Zoom Mineral Holdings Inc. The company partners with Philippine Gold Processing & Refining Corporation (PGPRC), fully owned by B2Gold, in processing gold ore.

The company began its operations in Aroroy in 1997 when it was granted a 25-year permit. The FRC operations expanded by 4,988 hectares in Aroroy in 2007, with PGPRC opening the same year. In 2010, it expanded by another 584 hectares. In November 2022, its original permit for the 290 hectares was renewed.

In its more than two decades of operation in Aroroy, Filminera hauled more than 63 tons of gold ore and earned approximately ₱130 billion pesos. In the first quarter of 2023, the company sold 29,650



ounces of gold at an average price of \$1,922 or ₱105,710 (at ₱55=\$1 exchange rate) per ounce. The company's total revenue during this period is estimated at ₱3.1 billion.

Meanwhile, B2Gold expects to process 7.8 million tons of gold ore in Masbate this year, to produce up to 170,000-190,000 ounces of gold. In total, B2Gold's net income reached \$286.72 million in 2022 from total gold production of 1.03 million ounces in its operations in seven countries.

## Mining damages

Filminera caused serious damages in more than two decades of operation in Aroroy. These include environmental destruction, poisoning bodies of water and rivers, destruction of civil infrastructure due to heavy mine explosions, landslides, displacement of residents and farmers, as well as militarization and cases of human rights violations.

Among these was in 2013, after pipe carrying the company's toxic and chemically contaminated water was punctured. Cyanide, a acrid and deadly poison, leaked and stank in Barangay Panique. Residents also recorded poison-related deaths of their livestock grazing near the river.

In response, the people of Aroroy mounted protests and resistance all over. In 2016, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources ordered the

temporary suspension of the company's operations due to lack of required permits.

The company was then also revealed to have submitted a deficient technical report to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and failed to pay more than ₱1 million in mine waste fees, among other violations. An environmental group and several personalities also filed a Writ of Kalikasan before the Court of Appeals in 2017 to halt the company's operations.

Meanwhile in August 2020, after a strong earthquake hit Masbate, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan passed a resolution calling on the MGB to immediately stop the operations of FRC. The local government feared that the company might cause a large-scale water leak containing toxic chemicals that would affect 40,000 residents.

Despite damages caused by the Masbate Gold Project, the reactionary government continues to support it. The project was even awarded the Presidential Mineral Industry Environmental Award in 2020. Government agencies and localities, and police and military institutions are colluding with the company to deodorize it using its "corporate social responsibility" programs.

## US provides Ukraine prohibited cluster bombs

At least 11 countries have expressed concern over the US' move to use cluster bombs in its proxy war in Ukraine against Russia. Among them are Laos and Cambodia, and US-allied countries such as Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Cluster bombs were sent to Ukraine as its army is running out of ammunition in a "counter-offensive" against Russia.

The use of cluster bombs violates international humanitarian law because it is a type of weapon that is indiscriminate and harmful to civilians. A cluster bomb is a bomb that contains many smaller bombs or bomblets. It is launched from the ground or the air and explodes mid-air. It releases dozens or hundreds of bomblets that fall over a wide area.

Not all bomblets detonate upon contact with the ground and instead are buried and explode when hit or stepped on. According to studies, up to 40% of the bomblet content of cluster bombs

do not explode when deployed. This was the experience of countries where cluster bombs were used, such as Laos, where the US dropped more than 20 million tons of cluster munitions in the 1970s and where 30% of the bomblets did not explode. An estimated 20,000 civilians, half of them children, were killed or injured by buried bomblets since 1975.

With the harm it causes to civilians, more than 120 countries signed an agreement in 2008 to ban the production and use of cluster bombs. Apart from China

and Russia, the US also did not sign. The country remains the largest military power that continues to manufacture and use such weapons.

The Communist Party of the Philippines, National Democratic Front of the Philippines, as well as other democratic and pro-peace organizations in the country, strongly condemned the provision and use of cluster bombs by the US in Ukraine. This will prolong and intensify the proxy war at the expense of civilians.

As expected, the puppet Armed Forces of the Philippines is silent on this matter. It runs contrary to their baseless complaints against the New People's Army's use of command-detonated explosives which is not prohibited by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention or the Ottawa Treaty. **AB**

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## Jollibee workers protest low wages, abuse

Laid off workers of Jollibee Food Corporation protested at its Journal Square restaurant in Jersey City, New Jersey, USA on July 6. They were fired after demanding a \$3 raise and better working conditions. Their protest action forms part of the "Justice For Jollibee Workers" campaign.

The workers called for their immediate return to work, payment of back wages for the days they were fired and an apology from the company for its abuse.

They criticized the restaurant manager's abuse of power and their unjust termination. Two weeks after the dismissal, Jollibee Journal Square employed replacement workers.

Jollibee should stop its deceptive scheme and give workers dignity, they said.

The Justice for Jollibee Workers campaign revealed that Jollibee

workers in the Philippines and other parts of the world are suffering from the same conditions. They receive low wages, while being overworked and abused. There is always a shortage of workers amid heavy workload in its restaurants. Jollibee Foods Corporation implements such policies despite making huge profits every year.

In 2022, the Tony Tan Caktiong-owned company recorded a net income of ₱7.56 billion. This is 19.4% higher than the company's net income before the pandemic. Caktiong is 7th among the 10

richest Filipinos in the country. Apart from Jollibee, the company also owns Mang Inasal, Chowking, Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf and Smashburger. It has 6,480 different types of restaurants worldwide. It plans to establish up to 600 more restaurants this year, more than the 542 it opened in 2022.

Jollibee is among the biggest 20 companies employing contractual workers. It has 1,150 restaurants in the Philippines and 234 overseas.

Despite the workers' legitimate campaign in 2018, the company brazenly fired 400 workers fighting for regularization and blatantly ignored the toothless statements of the Department of Labor and Employment. **AB**