



EDITORIAL

Stoke the flames of armed resistance to state terrorism

In the face of relentless terrorism being sown by armed minions of the US-Marcos regime and all-out oppression and violence against the toiling masses, the New People's Army (NPA) and all revolutionary forces are even more bound by the duty to fight to defend the rights and welfare of the Filipino people.

More than ever, the people and their Red fighters are fully determined to firmly hold the gun and advance the armed struggle, as the main form of the people's resistance to the fascist, puppet and oppressive ruling reactionary regime. They know that if the people do not fight with their army, nothing will stop the oppressive and exploitative landlords, big bourgeois compradors and their foreign capitalist cohorts from trampling on the interests of the masses, seizing their livelihood, plundering

the nation's wealth and destroying the environment.

The US-Marcos regime is pouring tens of billions of pesos into the ongoing campaign of armed repression and terrorism with the malevolent but futile aim of defeating the people's army and crushing the people's resistance. Armed repression is most brutal in areas being aggressively invaded and where land is being seized by plantations and mining operations, ecotourism projects, energy, construction of dams and other infra-

structure, in complicity with bureaucrat capitalist and military officers. In these areas, massacres, extrajudicial killings, torture, secret detentions, hamlets, food blockades, bombings and shelling are rampant.

In the face of the US-Marcos regime's all-out attacks, the Filipino people are firmly determined to strike back against the armed agents of Marcos and Duterte as means of attaining justice for the thousands of victims of the state's fascist terrorism. The masses, especially peasant victims of the AFP, thus broke in applause upon hearing news of the successful tactical offensive of the NPA in different parts of the country.

In Quezon, the NPA's successful tactical offensive in Tagkawayan,

Quezon on the morning of September 1, dealt a major blow to the AFP. Five M16 rifles were seized, and at least five fascist personnel of the 85th IB and paramilitary CAFGU were killed in an ambush by an NPA unit.

A few weeks earlier, on August 9, the NPA successfully ambushed a Philippine National Police (PNP) vehicle in Calatrava, Negros Occidental, seizing three automatic rifles and killing a police combat trooper. That same day, the NPA in Uson, Masbate,



successfully ambushed paramilitary troops who were sowing terrorism to secure the expansion of mining operations in the province.

In Sultan Kudarat, a province in Far South Mindanao, at least 22 troopers under the 37th IB were killed in a series of four tactical offensives by the NPA in June and July. These tactical offensives were in response to the brutal all-out offensives launched in the province since June 15 by at least four battalions under the 6th ID.

These victories show that at the tactical level, the NPA guerrilla units remain superior against the enemy's armed forces. This is due, primarily, to the deep and wide support of the masses and familiarity with the terrain. Units of the NPA employed tactics of concentrating larger forces against isolated and weaker enemy units. This was combined with the secret and silent dispersal and transfer of NPA units to avoid the larger enemy forces, to keep the adversaries deaf and blind, and make them punch the wind.

All this shows the NPA's determination to defend the welfare of the masses and resist the fascist violence of the US-Marcos regime, and belies the enemy's psywar line that the people's armed resistance "will soon be

defeated." Under the correct leadership of the Party, the people's army is ever determined to carry on along the path of protracted people's war and promote guerrilla warfare with the broad and deep support of the masses.

These victories shine light on the path of further advancing the revolutionary armed struggle. It inspires the people and all revolutionary forces, especially the workers and young intellectuals, to go to the countryside and tread the difficult path of armed struggle.

These victories must be reciprocated. Under the Party's leadership, all NPA commands in different parts of the country must develop a plan to launch small or large tactical offensives which they can win to deal blows and defeat the enemy piece by piece, and capture its weapons to arm the growing number of new Red fighters of the NPA. Mobilize and arm the peasant masses in their numbers, and carry out widespread guerrilla warfare to surround the enemy with the blazing fire of the people's war.

The NPA will continue to reap successes in launching tactical offensives because the unity of the army and the peasant masses continues to expand and deepen. Mass struggles for genuine land reform are being vigorously carried out, especially in the face of widespread land grabbing, plunder, and armed suppression. Party branches should be established in as many places as possible to serve as core and leader of the masses. Thoroughly strengthen the mass organizations of farmers, youth and women, to consolidate the power of the masses and establish the foundation of the new democratic people's government.

Under the leadership of the Party, the NPA and all revolutionary forces are determined to advance the armed struggle throughout the country and exert all effort to persevere on the path of the the people's war to fight and frustrate the campaign of fascist terrorism by the US-Marcos regime, and attain the aspirations of social justice and national freedom. **AB**

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NPA-Quezon seizes 5 M16s

The New People's Army (NPA)-Quezon (Apolonio Mendoza Command) seized five M16 rifles, ammunition and other military equipment from the ambush mounted against troops of the 85th IB and a CAFGU unit at Sitio Pag-asa, Barangay Mapulot, Tagkawayan, Quezon last September 1. Five soldiers were killed while four were confirmed wounded.

The soldiers were set to conduct patrols around their camp when Red fighters ambushed them. The ambush happened 500 meters away from their detachment.

The NPA-Quezon reported that fighters used a command-detonated explosive (CDX) which they aimed

and exploded against the soldiers. This runs contrary to claims by soldiers and police that the bomb exploded when operating troops of the 85th IB "stepped" on it.

NPA-Quezon spokesperson Ka Cleo del Mundo said the armed action "enforces justice for all victims

of the 85th IB." She added the offensive is "for our beloved masses who suffered torture, harassment and killings by fascist soldiers under the US-Duterte regime and which continue to be perpetrated under the current US-Marcos II regime."

There are approximately 20,000 victims of human rights violations during the AFP's focused military operations in the communities of Quezon since the Duterte regime.

Calls to probe 2022 election anomalies mount

Patriotic congressmen filed a resolution on August 31 to compel Congress to investigate the anomalies during the 2022 elections to shed light how widespread cheating was carried out to bring the Marcos-Duterte tandem to power. These anomalies belie declarations by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) that no cheating occurred in the last election.

At the center of this anomaly are the election returns (ER) which were dumped into the Comelec's transparency servers between 7 and 8 p.m. of May 9, 2022. Within this hour, votes of the Marcos-Duterte tandem soared ensuring their victory. This irregularity was first questioned by the group led by former Department of Information and Communication Technology (DIST) secretary Elisio Rio.

Nearly a year after the election, it was discovered that the said ERs all came from a single internet protocol (IP) address 192.168.0.2. According to Rio's group, 98.8% of the votes from Metro Manila, 95.5% from Cavite, 81% from Batangas and several other provinces were transmitted through this IP address. These votes came from 20,300 vote-counting machines (VCM). This information was drawn from the raw data released last February by the Comelec.

According to Rio, it is impossible and illegal for a very large number of VCMs to have a single IP address. According to Smartmatic's outlined process, each VCM should have an exclusive IP address. Neither was it agreed that the ERs will pass through a single machine before being received by the COMELEC's transparency server.

Rio's group is convinced that the ERs came from a secret machine which had the IP address of 192.168.0.2. This machine is control by COMELEC in collusion with Smartmatic and was most likely within the proximity of the transparency server, said Rio.

Another anomaly observed by Rio's group is that the timestamp in some ERs show they were received before they were printed by the precinct VCMs.

International supporters mount solidarity action for Philippine revolution

PROTESTS AND ACTIVITIES were held in Europe, Canada and the US on August 26 in support of the Philippine struggle for national liberation. The Global Day of Action was led by the Friends of the Filipino People in Struggle (FFPS), an international group supporting the Philippine national-democratic movement.

Activities were held in Utrecht, The Netherlands, Vancouver and Toronto in Canada, seven cities in Germany including Memmingen, Leipzig, Regensburg, Rostock and Ulm, Basel in Switzerland, Madrid and Valencia in Spain, and Oregon and Washington in the US.

In the Netherlands activity, the Revolutionary Eenheid, one of the local FFPS member organizations, defended the Philippine revolutionary movement from "terrorist" labeling by the Philippine reactionary state and the US. According to them, it is not terrorism for Filipino people to fight against national oppression and foreign imperialist domination.

FFPS emphasized the urgent need for struggling peoples worldwide to support the Philippine revolution in all its forms, especially the armed struggle.

Other groups staged lightning rallies, fora, leaflet distribution and information campaign, hanging streamers, poster campaign, and gatherings to promote the Philippine national liberation movement.

The August 26 FFPS action coincided with the commemoration of the Sigaw ng Pugad Lawin, which signaled the start of the Philippine Revolution against Spanish occupation in 1896.

NPA mounts 4 counter-FMO offensives in Sultan Kudarat

At least 22 soldiers of the 37th IB were killed in a series of offensives mounted by the New People's Army (NPA) in its counter-campaign against the 6th ID's focused military operations (FMO) in Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat. The division-strong operation has been running for more than two months since it began on June 15. In addition to the 37th IB, the operations also involve units of the 57th IB, 7th IB and troops of the Special Forces Battalion.

At least 18 soldiers were injured in these tactical offensives mounted between June 17 and July 26.

On June 17, the NPA-Sultan Kudarat fired at a column of the 37th IB at Sitio 30, Barangay Hinalaan. The following day, Red fighters fired at another unit of the 37th IB in the mountainous part of the same barangay. Five soldiers were killed in total while eight were wounded in the successive offensives.

The NPA ambushed an operating unit of the 37th IB in Barangay Datu Wasay on June 19. The attack by the Red fighters only lasted 15 minutes but due to fear and panic, the soldiers indiscriminately fired their weapons for two hours. Based on reports gathered, at least seven soldiers were killed and 10 were wounded.

On July 9, Red fighters conducted harassment operations against three columns of soldiers operating at Sityo Sorong, Barangay Hinalaan. Terrified, soldiers fired indiscriminately for three hours. The

AFP also fired at least 17 artillery shells.

Residents estimate at least 10 soldiers were killed in this NPA operation. Bodies of dead soldiers were brought to the barangay center where operating troops of the 37th IB were stationed. Reports also indicate that the unit covered up a mis-encounter between their units during the height of the firefight causing the death of their own troops.

To control information and sow terror, three communities were hamletted by soldiers where residents were forbidden to move about. This gravely affected the livelihood of farmers in the area.

Meanwhile, the NPA thwarted an attempted raid by soldiers in Barangay Batang-Baglas, Palimbang on June 26. The Red fighters were able to maneuver and inflict damage on the attacking enemy. At least seven soldiers were killed and 10 were wounded. Meanwhile, eight NPA fighters sustained minor injuries in the incident.

Sara Duterte's excesses and anomalies denounced

A PLETHORA OF issues of excesses and anomalies were uncovered in a Commission on Audit (COA) report questioning irregular 2022 transactions of Sara Duterte's office.

Foremost among these is her spending of ₱125 million confidential funds for which there was no item in the 2022 budget. It was discovered that this fund was consumed only within 19 days.

In the Congress deliberations for the 2024 national budget, patriotic congressmen requested the COA to scrutinize this and to ask Duterte for details where the funds came from and how they were spent. The unauthorized and clearly illegal transfer of funds to the vice president's office was also censured in the Senate.

The same report also revealed Duterte's hiring of a battalion-sized or 433-strong security personnel. This comprises 63% of her staff. She also spent ₱688,000 in her haste to transform offices and buildings which served as her campaign headquarters into vice president "satellite offices".



CBA in Paperland. The union in Paperland, Inc., a paper factory in Quezon City, secured an acceptable CBA on August 31. The agreement contained such workers' demands as wage increases, paid leave, union leave, hospitalization assistance, burial assistance, signing bonus and Labor Day assistance. The CBA was won by workers through collective action like ribbon-wearing and mounting picket protests.

Mandaue workers picket. Workers picketed in front of Cebu Easy General Services Corporation, a manpower agency, in Mandaue City on August 22 to demand their right to work. They were arbitrarily laid off from Liwayway Marketing Corporation (LMC), manufacturer of Oishi Snack Products, due to its transfer of operations to Liloan, Cebu.

Funds for rights, not atrocities. Workers groups staged a picket at the Senate on August 24 during the hearing of the 2024 budget to demand the state to allocate funds for wage increase, jobs and rights of Filipino people. They also called for a reduction of the bloated budget of police, military, NTF-Elcac, and confidential funds of Marcos and Duterte.

Protests against APEC meetings in US. The meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Seattle, US was disrupted with protests on August 20, as a forum was being held regarding the condition of women and the global economy. On August 16, another protest action was mounted by Bayan chapters in the US and Pacific Northwest People Over Profit Coalition, while APEC Energy Ministers held their meeting in the same city.

Dumping of Japan nuclear waste, denounced. Fisherfolk and environmental defenders protested in front of the Japanese embassy on August 16 to denounce the Japan government over its dumping into the Pacific Ocean of over a million tons of contaminated water used to cool the Fukushima nuclear plant.

More than a decade of MBLT-4 atrocities in Palawan

For 11 years and six months, the Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT)-4 unleashed terrorism against the people of Palawan. The unit was praised for its supposed key role in "ending" the New People's Army (NPA) in the province and maintaining "peace." In truth, the real mark left by the MBLT-4 in the province is its long record of human rights violations.

War of suppression

The MBLT-4 is the primary implementor of the brutal and intense war against the people and revolutionary movement in the province. The unit is responsible for numerous human rights violations including hamletting, intimidation, threat and harassment, food blockade, illegal search, mass forced surrenders and others. The indigenous Palaw'an, Batak and Tagbanua minorities were not spared from their atrocities.

Among this unit's rights abuses was forcing then 17-year-old indigenous Palaw'an Merkel Mansuna of Barangay Aribungos, Brooke's Point to serve as guide in a combat operation in June 2020. Before the said incident, soldiers raided five houses in Sitio Bayog of the said barangay. More than 10 families evacuated to avoid military interrogation and threats.

During that time, soldiers mauled a farmer in Barangay Cacawitan in Quezon town. In Barangay Iraan, Rizal, a 17-year-old indigenous Palaw'an named Dipdip was forcibly armed and coerced to join combat operations.

The MBLT-4 is also involved in a rape case of an underage indigenous female in Barangay Mainit in Brooke's Point. Involved are long encamped soldiers who residents have petitioned to be evicted from their communities.

Residents have also been prohibited from gathering firewood or timber, whereas soldiers themselves where illegally cutting trees for their camp construction. The MBLT-4 constructed three detachments to protect mining operations in the province.

Military troops of the MBLT-4 are also traitors to national sovereignty for holding military exercises together with the American troops in Palawan like the Marine Exercise (MAREX) 2022.

Terminator of revolutionary movement in Palawan?

On September 1, the US-Marcos II regime hyped that Palawan "insurgency-free." It was ludicrous how the MBLT-4 was recognized as they key unit of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) which supposedly ended the revolutionary movement in the province.

According to the NPA-Palawan, it is utterly moronic and stupid for Marcos to presume that they could end the revolution and the people's determination to fight all forms of

oppression and exploitation. It adds, "no matter how difficult and cruel [the conditions], the NPA-Palawan is determined to advance the people's war on the island and contribute to efforts to reinvigorate and intensify guerilla warfare nationwide."

The real motive of Marcos and his minions is to claim counter-revolutionary victories to make the province attractive to foreign investment and imperialist plunder. At present, contracts and foreign investments in energy, ecotourism and mining in Palawan are in the pipeline.

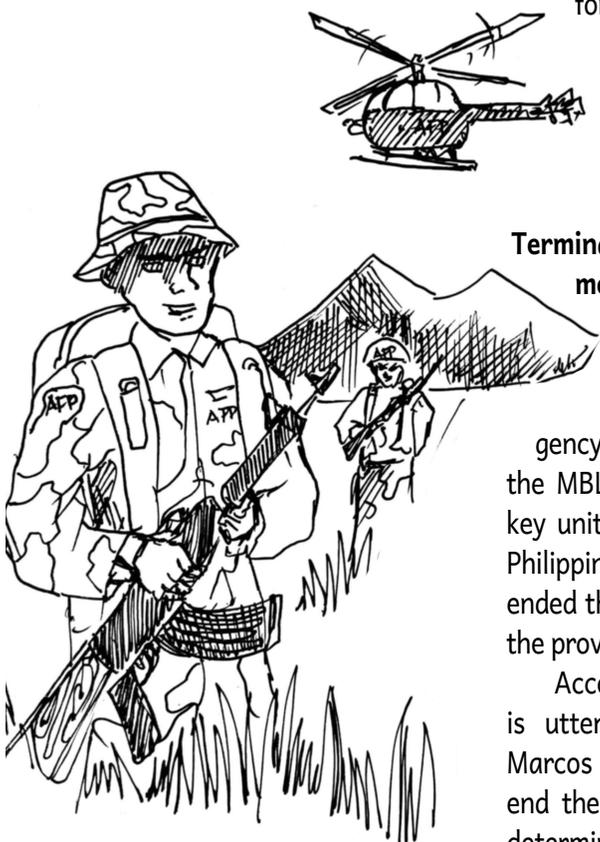
Apart from this, amid tensions on the West Philippine Sea, the regime desperately wishes to show its US imperialist master the readiness of the puppet army to serve as cannon fodder in the event of an imperialist war with China.

Who is the MBLT-4?

The MBLT-4 was stationed in Palawan from November 17, 2011 to July 17 this year, before they were returned to Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City for retraining. MBLT-4 is currently headed by Lt. Col. Glen Lorrito who was appointed on July 2021.

MBLT-4 was last stationed in Camp Daypo in Barangay Abo-Abo, Sofronio Española in Palawan. Upon its arrival in Palawan in 2011, it first operated in the towns of northern Palawan and eventually transferred to the southern part of the province in 2017. In the south, its combat operations covered the towns of Bataraza, Rizal, Brooke's Point and Quezon.

MBLT-4 was formerly under the operational control of the 3rd Marine Brigade of the Philippine Marine Corps (PMC). It operates together with the MBLT-3 on the island. MBLT-4 replaced the MBLT-7 which was used in the bombing of Marawi, in Sulu and Tawi-tawi. MBLT-9, which also came from Tawi-tawi, was also augmented to Palawan.



Whither the NTF-Elcac's funds for barangay development?

Since being initiated by National Task Force (NTF)-Elcac in 2021, the bogus Support to Barangay Development Program (SBDP) has received a massive ₱28.4 billion fund. Like the "surrender" campaign, "balik-aral" (return-to-school) and other counter-insurgency programs, this has lined the pockets of military officers and bureaucrats, through kickbacks in infrastructure projects in farflung sitios and barangays.

In three years, NTF-Elcac claims funding 3,187 barangay projects. This supposedly includes construction of roads, schools, irrigation and health centers, and sanitation and reforestation programs.

The program purportedly aims to improve people's lives to make them reject the path of armed struggle. In fact, none of these projects respond to the roots of widespread poverty, hunger, oppression and exploitation.

These NTF-Elcac projects also demonstrate how the delivery of government "services" and "development," especially in the countryside, has become militarized.

Slow projects, quick kickbacks

Apart from providing no meaningful changes, implementation of the handful of SBDP projects are snail-paced. The NTF-Elcac has yet to produce a 2023 status report of SBDP projects.

For 2022, the SBDP received ₱5.6244 billion. From the agency's own report on August 29, only 52% of the 1,719 planned projects were completed in 2022. Half of these were farm-to-market roads which paved the way for plantations, mines, ecotourism and other big businesses.

In 2021, only 26 or 1% of 2,318 SBDP projects were completed, according to a November 2021 report to the senate. In that period, more than 900 were in the pre-procurement stage, 700 were already in the procurement stage, while 560 were in the implementation stages. At present, NTF-Elcac claims 87% of the

projects were completed after more than two years.

"Infrastructure" projects are among the most widespread sources of kickbacks by government bureaucrats. The SBDP was started to give generals their milking cows to ensure their loyalty to the ruling clique.

In the past three years, Davao region military officers and complicit contractors were the biggest profiteers. The region got the lion's share of ₱5.22 billion, followed by Caraga (₱4.53 billion), Bicol region (₱3.82 billion) and Northern Mindanao (₱3.21 billion). Among provinces and cities, Bukidnon received the highest funds of ₱1.77 billion, followed by Davao de Oro (₱1.75 billion), Davao City (₱1.66 billion), Agusan del Sur (₱1.28 billion), Sorsogon (₱1.3 billion) and Iloilo (₱1.19 billion).

SBDP in Cagayan Valley

Among the regions, Cagayan Valley received the third lowest. The 5th ID got only ₱560.3 million SBDP funds in 2021-2023. The largest portion went to Cagayan—₱304.3 million for 41 barangays. Funding for Isabela, Quirino and Nueva Vizcaya started only in 2022.

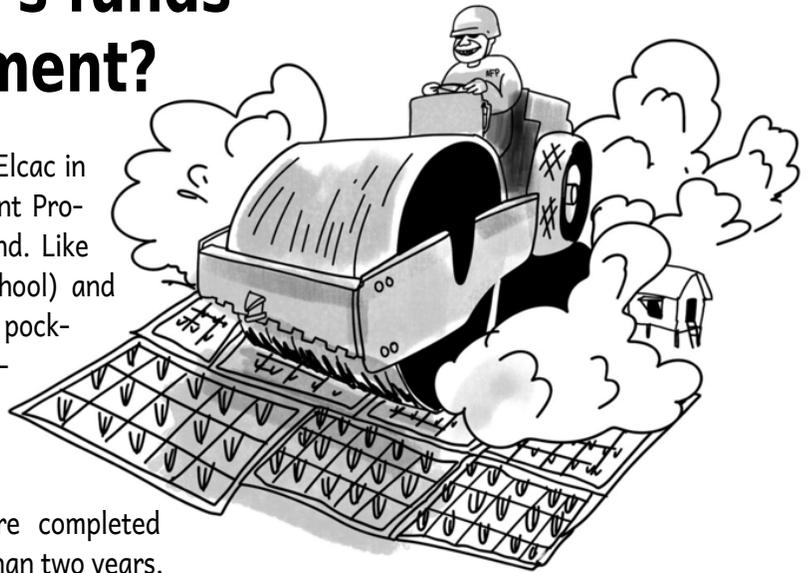
In the region's 105 barangays covered by the program, only 20 barangays have ongoing projects. One is the over-priced palay solar dryer and farm shed in Barangay Anurturu in Rizal town, Cagayan and barangays Apayao and Villa Reyno in Piat town. Meanwhile, none of the claimed rural farm-to-market road projects are new, but are merely re-

habilitation and upgrades. Among these is the still incomplete ₱15 million road in Barangay Minanga, Rizal, inaugurated in April 2021.

The AFP grandiosely claims that barangays under SBDP have been "cleared" through the Retooled Community Support Program (RCSP). However, of the 41 endorsed Cagayan barangays, only 37 were covered by RCSP. This indicates the selection of recipients is arbitrary, fabricated and vacuous. Favored are towns controlled by despotic landlords and outright counter-revolutionary bureaucrats and dynasties (Piat, Santo Niño, Tuao, Rizal) and those near military and police headquarters (Barangay Bangag in Lallo, Barangay Casambalangan in Santa Ana, Barangays Virginia and Balanni in Santo Nino, and Barangay Santo Domingo in Piat). The NTF-Elcac chief meanwhile was rewarded for being a minion and lapdog of the 5th ID when his turf, Tuao town in Cagayan, got ₱26.4 million.

Funds for 2024

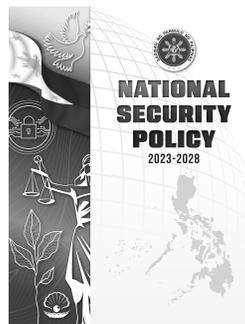
In the 2024 proposed budget, the US-Marcos regime plans to allot ₱10.34 billion for NTF-Elcac. This includes ₱8.64 billion for the SBDP which supposedly will go to 864 unnamed barangays. Progressive groups and the Makabayan bloc questioned the anomalous NTF-Elcac budget. The bloc is also pushing for the auditing of NTF-Elcac funds to scrutinize expenditure of billions of public funds.



26

bank accounts owned by the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) and RMP-Northern Mindanao

were arbitrarily closed by the state on trumped-up charges of "terrorist financing."



21

of the 22 state departments

were placed under the NTF-Elcac by virtue of the National Security Policy.



₱1.5 M

price of "cheap" housing offered by the state to those who do not own houses such as minimum wage earners.

159,000

classroom shortage



189,324

needs renovation

328%

increase in the budget for infrastructure projects

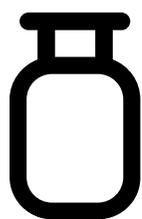
caused by the double and triple allocation from different departments and agencies.



21,727

unusable

But Sara Duterte's response: **Remove classroom decorations.**



₱73.15

increase for every 11-kilo LPG tank in September,

adds up to the ₱50.05 increase in August.



41.16%

only were able to graduate from college in 2022

because of the students' difficulty to cope up during the pandemic. This is now being falsely used as justification to dissolve the ₱51.12 billion budget for free tuition fee in 2024.

\$212 billion

increase in revenues of 25 leading defense companies in the US and Europe during the first half of the year.

This is amid the widespread selling of old arms to Ukraine and new arms to its allied countries.



2nd IB massacres 3 women in Masbate

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) unleashed brazen fascist terrorism in Masbate after it killed three civilians, and attempted to kill three others in August. There are now 18 victims of political killings in the province under the Marcos Jr regime.

The soldiers falsely claimed that the victims were New People's Army (NPA) members killed in an encounter.

On August 19, soldiers of the 96th IB and Masbate policemen summarily killed three women in Barangay Jagnaan in San Jacinto, Ticao island. The victims are Jelyn Guis Dejomo, 56, Sheryl Salazar Dejomo, 29, and Divina Lubiano Ajitan, 60. They were killed after an armed clash between the NPA and the military in the same area.

The military and police have long persecuted the three civilian victims accusing them of having ties with the revolutionary movement. They had suffered harassments and one was previously arrested by police on trumped-up charges.

The massacre is a war crime and a gross violation of the international humanitarian law by state forces. Human rights groups assert that the victims' rights as civilians should have been respected amid

the ongoing armed conflict.

Meanwhile, 2nd IB forces attempted to massacre three individuals in a house at Sitio Milagro, Barangay Guindawhan, Pio V. Corpus, Masbate on August 30. The victims were first reported to have been killed by soldiers' indiscriminate firing but were later confirmed to have escaped from the fascists' brutal crime. Unsatisfied, the fascists ransacked the said house and took away rice.

Killing *hors de combat*. State forces abducted and summarily executed two *hors de combat* fighters Jenny Fariolan (Ka Hope) and John Eric Talibo (Ka Blue) on July 29. The 61st IB claimed that the two were killed in a clash in Barangay Tagasing, Leon, Iloilo. In truth, there was no encounter and the two were unarmed when they were accosted and killed.

Abduction. Jhed Tamano, 22, and Jonila Castro, 21, were abducted by suspected state forces on

the evening of September 2. Eyewitnesses said the two were forced into a gray vehicle in front of the Orion Water District in Barangay Lati, Orion, Bataan. Tamano is a coordinator of the Community and Church Program for Manila Bay of the Ecumenical Bishops Forum while Castro is a volunteer for AKAP Ka Manila Bay. They are both graduates of Bulacan State University.

Arrest. Farmers' organizer Ernesto Baez Jr and two of his companions, Jose Escobio, and Junald Jabonero, were arrested and detained by police on August 24 in San Juan, Batangas. The police abducted them while traveling along Barangay Buhay na Sapa and were planted with guns, ammunition and magazines, and explosive devices as evidence.

Escobio and Jabonero were released on September 3 after the prosecution issued a resolution requiring a preliminary investigation. Meanwhile, Baez Jr needs to post bail to be released from the case of illegal possession of firearms.

On August 4, soldiers arbitrarily arrested farmer Alex Betito of Sitio Malapat, Barangay Baay in Labo, Camarines Norte. The soldiers detained him for several hours and subjected him to torture. It was also reported earlier that the soldiers detained and starved 10 other farmers in the same area.

Harassment. The Quezon City police charged Max Santiago and three other staffers of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan for violating the Clean Air Act. They allegedly violated the said law after burning the effigy they made during a protest on the second state of the nation address (SONA) of Marcos Jr.

Meanwhile, 14 Southern Tagalog activists were charged with violating the Public Assembly Act of 1985 for participating in protests during the SONA. AB

Groups mark International Day of the Disappeared

FAMILIES ANG FRIENDS of victims of enforced disappearances together commemorated last August 30 the International Day of the Disappeared. They demanded the immediate surfacing of and justice for their loved ones and friends who were abducted and disappeared by state agents.

In Manila, human rights groups led by Desaparecidos picketed the Court of Appeals to support the families of Dexter Capuyan and Gene Roz Jamil "Bazoo" de Jesus who filed a Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus in the said court last July 5.

According to Karapatan data, more than 1,000 individuals were disappeared under the Marcos Sr dictatorship, while 821 victims were recorded under the Cory Aquino regime, 26 under the Estrada regime, 206 during Rodrigo Duterte and ten during the first 14 months of the current regime of Marcos Jr.

Meanwhile, human rights groups lighted candles at the monument of Fr. Rudy Romano at the Redemptorist Church in Cebu City. Fr. Romano was abducted by suspected armed agents of the Marcos dictatorship on July 11, 1985, and has never been seen since.

Tiempo muerto amid inflation and climate change

Sugar plantation farmworkers annually suffer from *tiempo muerto*, "dead season" in Spanish, the months between sugarcane planting cycles. This usually lasts from June to September when "kampos" offer no jobs. In Negros, this is called "tigkiwiri" or season of suffering for 300,000 farmworkers and their families. This year, their suffering is worse amid skyrocketing prices of commodities, calamities resulting from climate change and intense militarization.

Among them is 35-year-old Derek, married with three toddlers. He and his wife earns ₱400 for working eight hours daily in various farms. Despite day-long toiling, their earnings are grossly insufficient for rice, meals, milk, and their children's other needs. To survive, the couple "sidelines" in copra work. Like other farmworkers, they are mired in debt in their attempt to live by the most basic needs of their family.

"It's worse this year, especially with higher prices," Derek says. "Instead of three, we only have two daily meals at times." Children's growth are most severely affected. State data indicates 40% of children 5-years and below in Negros Oriental are stunted. Stunted growth is an indication of severe malnutrition.

Poverty hasn't change, Aling Mali meanwhile asserts. Even if there was work, daily wages are only at ₱150. "Our earnings remain the same but expenses constantly increase. We have no choice but to get one loan after another." More often, their measly income go only to pay off debts.

This is not surprising given that Negros inflation is one of the highest nationwide. Last July, inflation rates registered 6.1% in Negros Occidental, and 4.1% in Negros Oriental. Prices of food and beverages are constantly rising.

Their difficulties were worsened further by incessant rains after a series of storms and southwest monsoon ravaged fields.

Contrary to threats of El Niño or

drought, Derek said "more frequent rains caused by consecutive storms have damaged corn and sugarcane fields." At the end of July, typhoon Egay rampaged through the island resulting in ₱46.7 million damages to crop, fish ponds and livestock in Negros Occidental alone. By the end of August, storm Goring hit causing ₱125.59 million worth of damages in the province.

In fact, Negros farmworkers endure year-round hunger because of their slave-like wages. According to the National Federation of Sugar Workers, farmworkers are often paid around ₱1,500 weekly or ₱300 daily, lower than the daily minimum wage mandated by law and much lower than living wages. Even lower are wages under the *pakyawan* (lump sum) system where big landlords pay ₱4,000-₱5,000 to a team of 4-8 people (₱625 per person) for a 5-6 day work.

In previous years, Negros farmworkers actively demanded the government to extend financial assistance during *tiempo muerto*, as well as in times of calamity. At the same time, they are fighting for a ₱150 increase in daily wages and 50% increase in *pakyawan* rates. They support the call for ₱750 across the board wage increase on a nationwide scale.

According to farmers, only by the dismantling the haciendas and ending the exploitation of farmworkers by a few landlords who make millions in profit, will put an end to the annual *tiempo muerto*. Distributing land to tillers and focusing on food production will ensure food security for hundreds of thousands of families.

"*Tiempo muerto* will constantly be a season of hunger and death to sugar farmworkers until the fundamental problem of landlessness in the country is addressed," they say.

