

EDITORIAL

## Sweep away the dark shroud of martial law

**M**ore than five decades have passed, still the country remains under the dark shroud of martial law imposed by Ferdinand Marcos Sr on September 21, 1972. The darkness grows thicker amid relentless fascism and corruption under the government of the dictator's son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, while Filipinos undergo severe sufferings, with plummeting living standards and gross violations of their rights.

Corruption today by leading officials of the Marcos-Duterte regime is brazen. They have zero recognition of responsibility to the people. They show complete contempt, disregard, or distort the laws of the reactionary system. Just as it was under the Marcos dictatorship, "democracy" under Marcos Jr is cheap trimmings to his power that recognizes no limits.

The Marcos-Duterte clique has the entire government machinery in their hands. Their main instruments of social control are the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the brutal, bloody and utterly illegal tactics of terrorism and repression against the people. It uses the National Task Force-Elcac, estab-

lished by Rodrigo Duterte, to place all government agencies under strict control, under pain of being accused of supporting "terrorism."

All branches and agencies of the reactionary Marcos government merely follow his dictates. The Marcos and Duterte supermajority dominates congress, both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The voice of the handful of minority oppositionists are drowned by Marcos and Duterte's minions, to railroad whatever Marcos and Duterte wants.

Since Marcos Jr assumed power, a number of cases involving close to



₱1.7 billion of Marcos stolen wealth were dismissed by the Supreme Court and other courts.

Under the reign of the dictator's son, Marcos Jr, power and public funds are used with impunity. Although questionable, immoral or outrightly illegal, a policy, program or measure is affirmed and offered to Marcos and Duterte. This is the "loyalty" proffered by minions of fascists and dictators, in exchange of course, for funding, favors or positions. This is now starkly demonstrated on the issue of "confidential and intelligence funds" (CIF) that are set to be allocated anew to the offices of Marcos (nearly ₱5 billion) and Sara Duterte (₱650 million). These are public funds that Marcos and Duterte secretly spend without accountability to the people. In the same way, Marcos' minions railroaded the ₱500-billion Maharlika Investment Fund which will give Marcos the power to funnel public funds to the pockets of his favored big capitalist cronies.

While daily the toiling masses suffer and try to feed their families with meager incomes, Marcos and his family and officials jet-set and live the life in one foreign trip after another, purportedly to invite foreign capitalists to invest or visit the Philippines. Marcos's close to ₱1.5

billion travel budget for 2024 is nearly three times bigger than that of 2022, and 5,000% bigger compared to 2021.

Marcos' ₱5-trillion proposed 2024 budget is a gargantuan budget for corruption. The largest part will go to infrastructure projects (bridges, roads, rails and others) which is the source of hundreds of millions of pesos of kickback that line the pockets of bureaucratic capitalists, in connivance with big businessmen, and foreign banks and corporations. Many of these projects drive people away from their land and homes, plunder and destroy the environment and cause ever greater disasters.

Alongside barefaced corruption and plunder of people's funds, the Marcos regime carries out relentless political repression and employs dirty tactics to silence its critics and eliminate all obstacles to corruption and anti-poor and anti-people programs. There are intensifying attacks and hamletting of rural communities, bombings and shelling, forcing civilians to "surrender", killings and massacres. There are increasing cases of abductions, torture and disappearance of activists who work for the welfare of the masses.

There seem to be no bounds to

the terrible darkness of Marcos Jr's tyrannical power and reign of state terrorism. But in fact, fascist brutality and unbridled corruption under the Marcos regime are signs of the further degeneration of the ruling semicolonial and semifeudal system. These accelerate further the deterioration of the ruling system, and sharpens the people's awareness of the need to act to defend their interests and rights, and advance their aspiration for revolutionary social change.

Now, more than ever, the Filipino people need to sweep away the darkness with which the entire country is being enshrouded by Marcos. They must dispel all the fear which the terrorist state is planting on their chest. Like in the years of martial law, the fascist reactionaries want the people to be gripped by fear and anxiety to crush their determination to fight back.

Thus, courage, determination and ardent militance are needed to tread the path of resistance, whether in the city or countryside, on the streets or on the path of armed resistance. In order not to allow the evils of the Marcos regime to reign, all democratic classes and forces must rise and fight.

Martial law in 1972 was declared by the US puppet state as a war against the Filipino people. Like in the struggle against the fascist dictatorship, armed struggle today is the most important form of struggle for the people to combat state terrorism, alongside all other possible forms and methods of collective struggle to fight corruption, fascism and subservience of Marcos Jr.

The Communist Party of the Philippines serves as the core, backbone, and leader of the widespread resistance of the Filipino people. We must consolidate and strengthen the Party, including its leadership of the New People's Army, to ensure the all-sided advance of the revolution and march at the forefront of the people's struggle to attain a prosperous future where democracy and freedom reign.

AB

 <p>Vol LIV No. 18   September 21, 2023</p> <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> Sweep away the dark shroud of martial law 1</p> <p>Funds for fascism and extravagance 3</p> <p>Multibillion confidential funds 4</p> <p>NPA launches armed action in 2 provinces 4</p> <p>Education budget cuts 5</p> <p>Sorsogon youth mount 'oplan pinta' 5</p> <p>Activist organizer, abducted in Negros 6</p> <p>Protests 6</p> <p>Jhed and Jonila: Faces of fake forced surrender 7</p> <p>In short 8</p> <p>Palay farmers suffer losses 9</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ang Bayan is published fortnightly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines</p>	
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# Large funds for fascism and extravagance

**A**mid people's gross suffering due to incessant price increase and plummeting economy, the US-Marcos regime's proposed budget teems with trillions of pesos of funds to line the pockets of a few, especially high bureaucrats, cronies and their families.

The regime's claims that the ₱5.768 trillion 2024 national budget is "pro-poor" is a big lie. In truth, the regime persistently scrimps on services and people's needs, while allotting colossal amounts of funds to support corporate and military profits. Token social support is being ultrahyped to obscure how meager these are relative to the extent and scope of current problems.

## Budget for all-out fascism

While the regime brags that the largest portion the proposed budget will go to basic services, it cannot conceal the enormity of additional funds for the military.

The biggest is the 21.6% increase in the defense budget to ₱282.7 billion from the current ₱232.5 billion.

This budget includes the ₱50 bil-

lion for the Armed Forces of the Philippines "modernization", which is 82% higher than last year. This will go to the purchase of military matériel, mostly second-hand equipment from the US, like multi-role fighters, radars, ships, missile systems, helicopters, drones and bombs for the next five years. These mostly are used against civilians and communities in the AFP's counter-revolutionary war in the countryside.

The proposed budget also includes the ₱9.7 billion for the NTF-Elcac, of which ₱1.08 billion will be for the police, and ₱8.64 billion for "Barangay Development Program." It has long been exposed that these funds go straight into the pockets of AFP and PNP officials, and also used to sow terror against peasant masses and minorities.

In addition, retired soldiers and police are like parasites who continue to suck public funds. The planned ₱129.82 billion 2024 pension funds is larger than the entire budget of only ₱108.5 billion for agriculture.

## Scrimping social services

While pouring funds to the police and military, funds are grossly lacking for social services.

Next year, funds for social services will be cut extensively. The Department of Education (DepEd) is touted to receive the largest

budget increase, these will accrue only to offices directly under Sara Duterte. Other DepEd attached agencies, including the National Book Development Board, National Council for Children's Television, National Museum of the Philippines, Philippine High School for the Arts, Early Childhood Care and Development Council, and the National Academy of Sports, will see their budgets cut.

There are also large budget cuts in agencies providing economic and social services. These include the Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Migrant Workers.

The health sector will suffer a big blow in 2024 with the close to ₱10 billion cut in the DoH budget. All in all, health will only receive ₱481 billion, or 8% of the whole national budget.

Agencies that will suffer budget cuts include the Philippine General Hospital, Lung Center of the Philippines, National Kidney & Transplant Institute, Philippine Children's Medical Center, and the Philippine Heart Center.

Funds for the Department of Social Work and Development's "emergency assistance programs" to extend assistance to Filipinos in dire need, will also be cut by almost ₱28 billion.

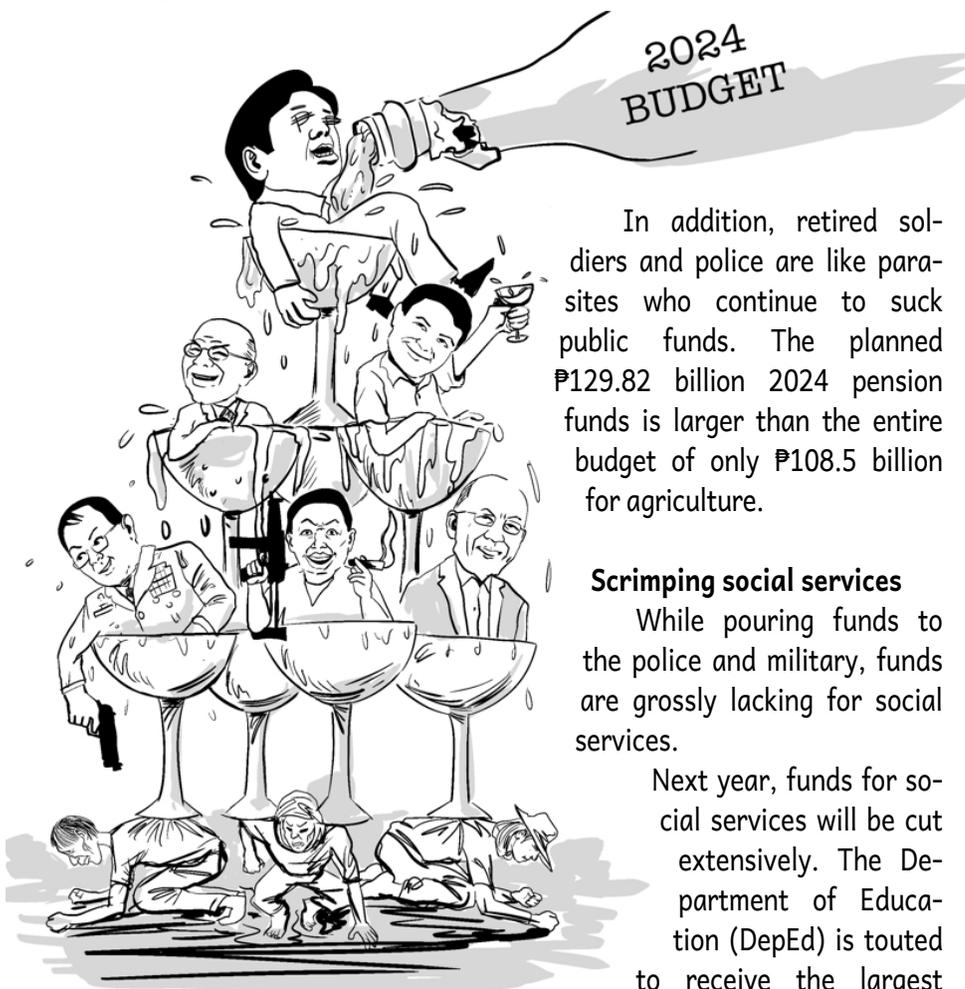
Up to 30 state universities and colleges will have budget cuts in 2024. (See related article.)

## Trillions in discretionary funds

The national budget is Marcos Jr's veritable personal bank as he directly controls almost half, or 43%, of it. This means he can very easily juggle nearly ₱2.5 trillion in next year's funds, whenever he wants or for whatever purposes.

"Automatic appropriations", "special purpose funds" and CIF

*Continue on page 4*



## Multibillion confidential funds

Logging the headlines over the past weeks are the "confidential and intelligence funds" (CIF) for Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Sara Duterte and 22 other state agencies for the next year. Marcos will get ₱4.85 billion in CIF next year while Sara Duterte will get ₱650 million.

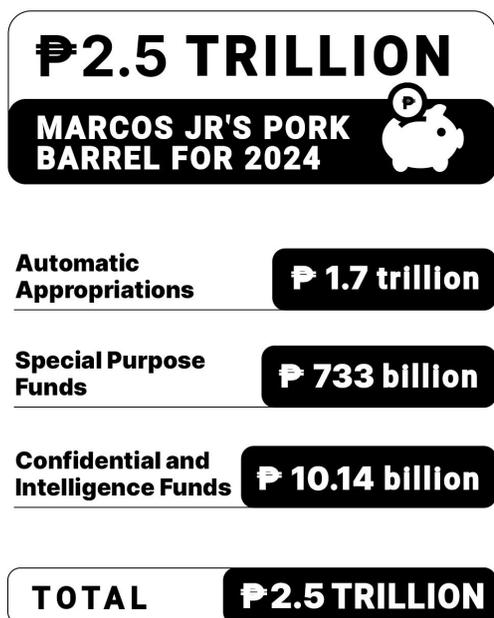
Recall that in 2022, Marcos Jr committed barefaced corruption when he transferred ₱221.4 million from his presidential "contingent fund" to Sara Duterte's office. From this amount, the vice president allotted ₱125 million for "confidential funds" which, according to documents, were spent in only 19 days—or ₱17 million per day. Because the funds are "confidential", their exact purposes are not made public.

CIF are not new. But despite people's protests, it has continuously increased over the past decades. In 2001, under Gloria Arroyo, the entire CIF was ₱959.5 million. It ballooned during Rodrigo Duterte's term to ₱1.7 billion in 2016, and further to ₱6.88 billion in 2017. The 2024 ₱10.14 CIF is 957% larger compared to that in 2001.

The reactionary government's CIF is patterned after the US government's so-called "black budget". Use of the black budget is deliberately hidden from the public because it usually funds the government's illegal operations.

In the Philippines, this is used in "delicate security operations," like the construction of "safe houses", "informant" fees, purchase or rental of vehicles for

"special operations" and others related to heinous crimes like extrajudicial killings, arrests and detention. In Sara's case, this is also being used for surveillance and monitoring against the teachers' union and student activists. Because unaudited, these funds easily end up in officials' pockets, both in the civil bureaucracy and military.



## NPA launches armed action in Masbate and Negros Occidental

A SOLDIER WAS killed while two others and three police officers were wounded in armed actions mounted by the New People's Army (NPA) in Masbate and Negros Occidental in the past weeks.

A people's militia unit fired upon a police counterinsurgency unit at Sitio Kampon, Barangay Batuhan, Masbate City on the night of September 3. At least three police officers were wounded in the armed action.

The said barangay and adjacent communities in Masbate have long been subjected to military and police control. They occupy barangays under the veil of the Retooled Community Support Program. This causes extreme distress to the peaceful livelihood of peasants and residents.

In Negros Occidental, Red fighters of NPA-Central Negros fired upon 62nd IB troops operating at Purok Tumpok, Barangay Riverside in Isabela on August 30. The said troops were resting when they were attacked by the NPA around 9:30 p.m.

NPA-Central Negros reports that a soldier was killed while two others were wounded. Terrified, the troops of the 62nd IB scampered in various directions. They also concealed the number of casualties among their ranks.

Meanwhile, NPA-West Cagayan reported the death of eight 17th IB soldiers in an encounter in Barangay Sicalao, Lasam, Cagayan on July 23. The NPA unit safely maneuvered away after the armed encounter.

From page 3

can all be considered presidential "pork barrel" funds because, in the first place, congress has no control over these funds.

The largest chunk of Marcos' pork barrel is the so-called "Special Purpose Funds" (SPF) or "lump sum" budget. Up to ₱733 billion are considered SPF in 2024. A large SPF item is the "Miscellaneous Personnel Benefits Fund" (MPBF), which will increase by an eye-popping 409%

from the present ₱26.6 billion to ₱135.7 billion next year.

The special provision on the use of the MPBF states that it can be used for "deficiencies in authorized salaries, bonuses, allowances, associated premiums and other similar personnel benefits of National Government personnel, including Personnel Services requirements for the filling and creation of positions as may be authorized by law, the Presi-

dent of the Philippines, or the DBM."

With the large increase for MPBF, Marcos ensures the salaries and bonuses of his regime's highest officials, including himself.

Marcos Jr' cronies and allies will also be indulged by the large increase in the proposed budget. Up to ₱1.418 trillion will go to the despicable "Build Better More" infrastructure program drooled over by his family's billionaire cohorts for its large kickbacks. **AB**

# Education budget cuts

The future of the Filipino youth is clearly not a priority of Ferdinand Marcos Jr's reactionary government. Despite the 9.5% increase in the proposed 2024 national budget, the budget for state universities and colleges (SUC) was cut by 5.8%. From the already insufficient ₱107 billion for 2023, only around ₱100.9 billion is being allotted for 2024.

More infuriatingly, the proposed budget is not even a third (1/3) of the much needed ₱331.34 billion budget for 117 SUCs. In the Marcos regime's proposal, SUC infrastructure (capital outlay) suffered the biggest cuts. Of the requested ₱200.4 billion, only ₱5.5 billion, or not even 3%, was allocated.

Of the 117 SUCs, 30 will suffer budget cuts. The biggest is the ₱2.9 billion in the University of the Philippines (UP) budget. Its budget in the previous years have constantly gone down—from ₱24.29 billion in 2022, to ₱24.26 in 2023 and only ₱21.29 for 2024.

The next biggest cuts are in the budgets of the Mindanao State University (₱2.3 billion), Mariano Marcos State University (₱1.5 billion), Eastern Visayas State University (₱1.3 billion), Central Bicol State University (₱1.2 billion), and West Visayas State University (₱852.9 million).

### Insufficient budget for free tuition

This 2023, the free tuition program received only ₱18.74 billion for 1.74 million SUC students. According to reports, this is short by ₱4.23 billion to cover all students. In the 2024 proposed budget, the ₱21.7 billion will again fall short by ₱4.16 billion

for the estimated 1.8 million students expected to avail of free tuition fee.

Due to lack of funds, teachers and facilities, SUCs accommodate only a limited number of students. Last year, 105,000 lined up but UP admitted only 15,000 students; while of the 173,000 who took the exams, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines admitted only 20,000.

Not even half of the 4.43 million college students can avail of free tuition. More are being forced to enrol in private colleges and universities due to lack of public schools. Each college student is estimated to spend an average of ₱150,000 each year.

Students are thus outraged by proposals of Benjamin Diokno, the Marcos regime's finance secretary, to further reduce the number of student beneficiaries of free tuition on claims of being "unsustainable." He also insists that the number of SUCs in the country be reduced.

Student groups retort that what is unsustainable is the ₱78,852.14 daily salary of Diokno compared to ₱64.74 daily state expenditure per student availing of free tuition.

### All-out support for military education

While SUC funds are being cut,

government funds continue to pour for the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). In previous years, its funds rose constantly, from ₱1.36 billion in 2022, to ₱1.47 billion this 2023, and further to ₱1.58 billion in 2024.

PMA cadets are excessively pampered. This year, the government spent ₱1.13 million for each of its 1,300 cadets. Meanwhile, the state spent a much lower ₱61,686 each on average for SUC students this year. In short, the funds for each PMA cadet is equivalent to that for 18 SUC students. AB

### Sorsogon youth mount 'oplan pinta' against militarization

TO MANIFEST THE people's indignation over continuing fascist abuses by the 31st IB in the barangays of Donsol, Sorsogon, youths launched "oplan pinta" (painting slogans) along the roads at the center of Donsol.

Among the brave words painted by the youth are "31st IB out! Murderers!", "AFP terrorists", "Oust Marcos Jr!". This lends voice to the Donsol people's opposition to the fascist troops' operations in their town.

According to the youths, this is their response to the shooting by the 31st IB on August 4 on the house of Barangay Alin Captain Erwin Vista who is also president of the Association of Barangay Captains (ABC). Soldiers conducted an RCSP operation in the said barangay last August.

Apart from combat operations in Donsol, soldiers also launched RCSP operations in Barangay Migabod and Barangay Catamlangan in Pilar town.

BUDGET CUT	2023 Budget	2024 SUCs budget request	2024 Budget proposal
Personnel Services	₱56.61B	₱75.21B >>>	↓ ₱59.60B
Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses	₱35.81B	₱50.20B >>>	↓ ₱35.80B
Capital outlay	₱14.62B	₱205.90B >>>	↓ ₱5.50B
<b>Total</b>	<b>₱107B</b>	<b>₱331.34B</b>	<b>↓ ₱100.90B</b>

# Activist organizer, abducted in Negros; driver found dead

State agents abducted Bea Lopez, peasant organizer, and Peter Agravante who drove the tricycle she hailed in Sipalay City, Negros Occidental on September 15. According to reports, the two were travelling towards Barangay Gil Montana when they were blocked by armed men and forced to board a white van. The tricycle was also loaded onto a pick-up truck.

A day later, residents found the remains of Agravante dumped by the road side in Satori Cliff in Barangay Nagbotalao, Basay, Negros Oriental. His hands and feet were bound by duct tape. He was also gagged using duct tape. He had a gunshot wound on the head.

Meanwhile, a lawyer and another peasant was reported summarily killed in the past two weeks.

In Abra, Atty. Maria Saniata Alzate, a lawyer providing free legal services to indigent defendants, was shot dead in front of her house in Bangued on September 14. She is the third lawyer killed under the Marcos regime.

Alzate was known as a lawyer for a client who filed a *writ of amparo* petition. This client was abducted, tortured and illegally detained by police in Bangued, Abra this year. The court concurred with the petition and placed six of the eight involved police under investigation.

In Masbate, three state elements summarily killed 67-year old peasant Naldo Canama at Sitio Angkay, Barangay Tubog in Cawayan town, on September 7. According to reports, the three perpetrators who gunned down Canama were riding a motorcycle. Canama is the 19th victim of extrajudicial killing in the province under the Marcos regime.

**Arrest.** Police and soldiers arrested peasants Judy Blazer, 61, and Junjie Camanso, 30, at

Sitio Mainit, Barangay Santol, Binalbagan, Negros Occidental on September 10 over trumped up charges of murder and attempted murder. They are accused of having links with the revolutionary movement. Blazer was arrested despite being nearly blind and unable to walk due to old age.

**Bombing.** The 82nd and 12th IBs shelled Barangay Cabatangan, Lambunao, Iloilo eleven times on September 15. The bombing lasted 2 hours with some bombs exploding just around 100 meters away from house clusters.

Apart from this, over 200 military troops continue to ransack and sow terror in the peasant and indigenous communities since September 3 in the towns of Calinog and Lambunao, Iloilo.

**Shooting.** The 94th IB sowed terror by firing an M203 grenade and raining bullets in Barangay Buenavista, Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental on August 17.

Soldiers fired five M203 ammunition at Sitio Cantupa-Pisok, Barangay Buenavista. This traumatized the Martinez and Mariano families in the community, including 11 minors.

After this, soldiers ransacked the Martinez household and occupied it for several hours. Amid the wailing of children, soldiers fired shots while making wild noises. The family members of the Mariano family were also maltreated and threatened.



**Rollback rice prices.** Workers led by Kilusang Mayo Uno launched protests on September 12 against rising prices of commodities especially rice. They clamor for increases in workers' wages to help them cope with the unbridled increase in prices of commodities.

**Justice for Alzate.** Members of the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) together with other democratic groups conducted a mass action on September 14 in Quezon City to condemn the brutal extrajudicial killing of Atty. Maria Saniata Alzate. The action coincides with the commemoration of NUPL's 16th anniversary. A similar action was held in Baguio City and Iloilo City.

**Oust Diokno and Balisacan.** Six agricultural groups held a motorcade rally on September 18 to demand the ouster of Department of Finance secretary Benjamin Diokno and National Economic Development Authority chief Arsenio Balisacan after they proposed the total elimination of tariff on imported rice.

**Student protests in UP and Ateneo.** On September 12, students of the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman gathered at Palma Hall in its Quezon City campus in protests during the first day of classes for the academic year in the university. They expressed opposition to UP budget cuts. A similar action was held at UP Los Baños on September 7.

Meanwhile, students held a series of protests in Ateneo de Zamboanga University (AdZU) and Ateneo de Davao University (AdDU) on September 15 and 16 against Mandatory ROTC.

**Fuel subsidy, grossly insufficient.** Drivers under Piston, together with members of its national council, protested in Cebu City on September 18 to condemn the meager and undistributed fuel subsidy promised by the regime. The protest coincided with the 11th week and another "big time" increase on oil prices where diesel prices rose by ₱2-₱2.40 per liter on that day.

# Jhed and Jonila: Faces of fake forced surrender

The National Task Force-Elcac was cut down to size in its own press conference on September 19 when Jhed Tamano and Jonila Castro bravely exposed their abduction, detention, threat and coercion by the military to "surrender."

Environmental activists Tamano and Castro were abducted in Orion, Bataan on September 2. According to witnesses, the two struggled against armed men forcing them to board a van. One even attempted to climb a nearby house's gate but failed to escape. Only their slippers were left as hint of their violent abduction. Inside the van, soldiers introduced themselves as surveillance agents of the 70th IB. For 14 days, the military denied having the two in custody.

## Shattering the lies

"The truth is we were abducted by the military," Castro and Tamano fearlessly declared, stupefying the 70th IB commander beside them. "The contents of the affidavit (that we supposedly surrendered) are false as they were prepared and signed inside a military camp."

Even at the onset of the search by organizations for Tamano and Castro on September 4, police clearly had full knowledge of their whereabouts. PNP Orion blocked Castro's mother Rose from filing a

blotter report and refused to sign the Desaparecidos Form signifying they do not have the two in custody.

According to the elder Castro, authorities knew how to contact her daughter as they frequently visit her introducing themselves as soldiers and NTF-Elcac agents to get her to convince her child to "surrender." She asserts her child's innocence and supports her activism which merely helps her fellow people.

## Struggle against reclamation

Castro and Tamano were investigating the effects of the Manila Bay reclamation project on the livelihood of fisherfolk and on the environment. Castro decided to be a full-time AKAP Ka Manila Bay volunteer after suffering the difficulties of studying during the lockdown. Tamano is a volunteer of the Ecumenical Bishops Forum who finished business economics but skipped graduation rites because time with the community is more important for her. Both know the community residents' difficulties brought about by projects like the

San Miguel Corporation's New Manila International Airport in Bulacan.

They were preparing for relief operations in Bataan before their abduction. Rapid flooding in Bataan became more conspicuous during the past two typhoons. Apart from this, fisherfolk in Bataan have long been suffering from low income due to offshore and seabed quarrying.

Last June, the Bataan provincial council approved the 235-hectare Mariveles Bay reclamation. Through the Premium Megastructures, Inc., the largest "transshipment hub" will be constructed.

"We need to focus on people's issues, the end to reclamation and the defense of fisherfolks' livelihood in Manila Bay", Castro asserts after expressing gratitude to the campaigners and supporters for their surfacing and release.

According to the group Kalikasan, the abduction and fake forced surrender of Castro and Tamano aim to cover up the destructive effects of projects by the government and large corporations. But the state failed to crush the dedication of environment defenders to expose this truth.

## 'Surface the Desaparecidos'

"We are not the sole desaparecidos. Thus we raise the call for the surfacing of all the victims of forced disappearance because we know the perpetrators of this scheme," said Castro in the press conference held in the Commission on Human Rights after they were released from military custody. The two were welcomed by other activists, lawyers, human rights defenders and their families.

At present, eight abducted individuals remain missing and un-surfaced. Those surfaced were also being made to parade as fake surrenderers like Castro and Tamano, and Dyan Gumanao, Armand Day-oha and Steve Tauli.



# \$2 M

secret "donation" by House Speaker Martin Romualdez to Harvard University,

one of the expensive universities in the US. It is believed that this "vanity project" was funded by the Marcos family's ill-gotten wealth.



# 500

war games and other military activities

will be held by the US in the Philippines in 2024, more than double the number in previous years.

# 80%

of TESDA graduates with employment

receive wages lower than the minimum.

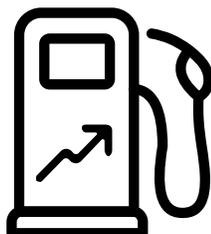


# ₱33

meager wage increase granted by the Central Visayas regional wage board,



way below the ₱150 increase demanded by workers in the region.



11 consecutive weeks in prices of petroleum products in the Philippines

a result of the blatant controlling of crude oil supply to push its prices to \$100 per barrel.

# ₱11.6 billion

2021 performance-based bonuse (PBB) will finally be distributed to 920,000 public school teachers.

The DBM released the funds amid continuous demand by teachers.



# 13,000

workers of the 3 biggest car companies in the US staged a strike on September 14

amid CBA negotiations for wage increase, job security and provision of the cost-of-living allowance (COLA).

# INSULTING!

was how **Migrante** described the mere 15-year jail time penalty for the Kuwaiti who raped, killed and burned the cadaver of Filipina domestic helper **Jubilee Ranara**



# 43

basic commodities (food and others)

are expected to become costlier by ₱0.10 up to ₱9.75 within the year.

# Rice is expensive but palay farmers suffer losses

Filipinos could barely cope with steep prices of rice which have reached ₱60-₱70 per kilo, in apparent tandem with price increase of oil and other commodities. Marcos ordered price controls over two types of rice in September, but large businesses simply hoarded their rice supply thus leaving common rice at high prices in the market.

With his own officials in disagreement, Marcos slowly revoked the price control order. He then bragged of supposed plans to develop local production which are no different to the Masagana 99 program of his dictator father. In the 1970's, this program plunged hundreds of thousands of families into bankruptcy and debt.

Marcos declared that import-dependence is "not beneficial" to the country. But just after a few days, his officials announced plans to reduce or remove tariffs on imported rice, supposedly to "lower prices" on the market. This coincided with reports saying that the Philippines is set to surpass China as the world's biggest rice importer.

None of these measures explain why rice is expensive in the country, and more importantly none of these address the basic problems of rice farmers.

## Farmers' loss

It is ironic that while rice prices go up, conditions of rice farmers plummet. Most go bankrupt due to high production costs, primarily land rent and fertilizer. Production remains small-scale and individualized, unmechanized and largely rain-dependent. Their conditions are further aggravated by the deluge of rice imports which pull down farmgate prices of palay. Manipulation of prices and supply by large traders and importers are unabated.

In Laguna and Mindoro rice paddies, farmers' expenses reach ₱50,000 to ₱100,000 for each planting cycle, depending on land size. A farmer can sell over ₱100,000 at harvest with palay farmgate prices at ₱14-₱17 per kilo. But after subtracting all production cost, he

would be lucky to be left with ₱6,000, equivalent to ₱74 per day for four months of work. There are cases in Mindoro where farmers' net profit reach only up to ₱968 for four months, or an equivalent of ₱12 per day. In relatively large parcels of land, net profits may reach ₱27,000. Nevertheless, this still only amounts to ₱337 per day based on a five-day work week.

One of the single biggest expense of rice farmers is land rent. For decades, they have languished under the "percentage" or "taxation" system of 70-30 or 60-40, in favor of the landlord. Even in cases where the percentage system favors farmers, land rent remains high considering that the landlord contributes absolutely nothing to production.

Such is the case of Mang Nilo, 59, who tills under the "taxation" system. During last harvest, he paid the landlord 15 cavans (825 kilos) out of a 90-cavan harvest. This is equivalent to ₱12,375 land rent with palay farmgate prices at ₱15 per kilo. This comprises 22% of his total production cost.

Terms are worse when production costs are shouldered by the landlord. Here, farmers only get 10% of the entire harvest. Such is the situation of Mang Teroy who tills a 1.2-hectare land. For his labor, the landlord paid him "wages" of 17 cavans out of 167 cavans of harvested rice, equivalent to ₱15,895 or ₱198.68 per day. He sold 10 cavans to a contracted agribusiness company which itself sold him fertilizer and pesticide. He tried to stretch the remaining seven cavans for his family's consumption but was still forced to

## SOME EXPENSES FOR A 1.5-HECTARE FARMLAND IN MINDORO



**₱5,000**

**Seeds**  
5 sacks



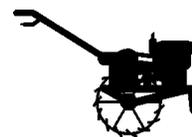
**₱22,400**

**Fertilizer**  
8 sacks of urea



**₱1,160**

**Pesticide**



**₱4,225.80**

**Crude**  
for tractor operation



**₱8,470**

**Rent**  
for thresher/harvester

purchase rice at the market at ₱50 per kilo.

High cost of production forces farmers to borrow from banks or micro-lending agencies to plant. (See the table for farm input costs.) In the case of Aling Lea from Laguna, she needed to borrow ₱25,000 during the previous season to cover her planting costs. The loan incurs an ₱850 interest per month within four months. Delays will incur her a fine of ₱1,000 per day.

In Mindoro, businessmen buy rice at ₱14-15 per kilo. For 130 sacks of rice (7,150 kilos), a businessman spends ₱100,100. Additional expenses include rice processing (drying, milling, loading and transportation) usually amounting to ₱27,000. He sells freshly-milled rice at ₱50 to resellers or ₱232,000 per harvest cycle.

He, thus, earns ₱105,105 or ₱22.62 per kilo of rice he sells on the market. At face value, actual rice price is only ₱27.38 per kilo if based solely on production cost and processing prior to market selling. **AB**