

EDITORIAL

Indict Marcos! Wage revolution against corruption!

Protests across the country against the state's corruption system continue to surge. It reflects the seething anger of the broad masses of the Filipino people against the monstrous bureaucrat-capitalist plunder of the Marcos regime.

To shield himself from the people's anger, Marcos is trying to polish his image to reverse his long-standing reputation as a purveyor of corruption. While aiming at some political rivals and even allies who don't remit their kickbacks, Marcos is trying to conceal his own role in the widespread corruption.

Marcos established a meaningless "independent commission" that is supposed to investigate the anomalous flood-control projects. This investigation ordered by Marcos Jr is merely a tactic to confuse the public and divert attention from him.

Marcos is truly the mastermind of corruption behind the anomalous flood-control project, into which he poured more than ₱1 trillion since taking power in 2022. As with his predecessors, Marcos has pocketed billions of pesos from kickbacks on multibillion-peso government contracts, including roads, bridges, railways, and other major construction projects, as well as smuggling, defense contracts, land lease contracts, and a myriad forms of pocketing the nation's funds.

The bureaucrat-capitalist leader Mar-

cos indulges in luxury and extravagance. He is known for his penchant for multimillion-peso exclusive concerts and lavish feasts, like those held for his recent birthday. He was

heavily criticized for flying to Singapore just to watch car races. He and his wife used public funds to turn Malacañang into a private vacation house for their family's whims.

Marcos is a brazen liar when he pretended to stand with the people in condemning corruption and claimed he would join the protests were he not president. The truth is that Marcos holds the repressive power of a fascist state, which he uses to bleed the nation and crush all forms of people's resistance.

The legacy of the 14-year fascist dictatorship and plunder of the people's money by his father, Marcos Sr, lives on. Organizers and members of workers' unions, community associations, student organizations, and human-rights advocates are surveilled, harassed, and targeted for violent attacks by state agents. Hundreds of political prisoners remain jailed. Human-rights and international humanitarian law are rampantly violated as Marcos imposes martial law in thousands of rural barangays to suppress the people's defense of their land and livelihood against the entry or expansion of plantations and mining operations.



Marcos, head of the bureaucrat-capitalist state, is the king of corruption. He is the chief fascist with an iron fist who crushes all dissent. He is the chief puppet of the Americans and factotum serving the strategic economic, financial, and military interests of US imperialism.

The Filipino people are victims of widespread, systemic corruption and fascism. They suffer from decaying social services, rising cost of living, low wages, widespread unemployment, loss of livelihood, and a general deterioration of socio-economic conditions. They are rising and protesting to hold Marcos and the corrupt to account.

Filipinos must strengthen their unity, build their organizations, and expand and intensify their protests in the coming months. They should expose and reject the forces riding the anti-corruption protests who defend Marcos in exchange for profit and position. These forces serve Marcos's schemes to calm the protests. Yet they fail, because Marcos's hollow and meaningless displays only further fuel the

protest movement. Calls for Marcos's resignation or ouster and for the removal of all corrupt officials from the state are mounting.

As the protests against Marcos and widespread corruption broaden, the Filipino people should raise and link them to the broader struggle to end the oppressive, exploitative semicolonial and semifeudal system. This system is

dominated by big bourgeois compradors, bureaucrat-capitalists, and big landlords.

These classes in the Philippines were engendered by US imperialism and control the neocolonial state. They all answer to, serve and collude with US imperialism in plundering the nation's wealth and in the fascist suppression of the broad masses. In particular, the

bureaucrat-capitalists use state power to steal public funds and amass riches through every form of corruption.

In the end, the struggle against corruption and all forms of oppression of the Filipino people go beyond removing Marcos, or even ousting the entire government. Systemic corruption can only be uprooted through a people's democratic revolution to end the three basic problems of bureaucrat-capitalism, imperialism, and feudalism. This is being carried forward by the Communist Party of the Philippines, which wields the New People's Army as the main weapon to destroy the armed forces of the

reactionary and neocolonial state.

The Party urges the Filipino people to further strengthen their revolutionary organizations, broaden the ranks of the National Democratic Front, and support and join the New People's Army.

The Party calls on youth to go to the vast countryside where the revolutionary movement continues to build organs of political power. These are built on the foundation of revolutionary mass organizations of peasants, youth, women, and other democratic sectors, alongside the people's army. They serve as seeds of a democratic people's government that will replace the rotten, puppet regime at the moment of revolutionary victory in the armed struggle for national liberation and social justice.





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Flood of protests surge against bureaucrat-capitalists' corruption

Youth and people in their tens of thousands stormed the streets in the past two weeks to strongly condemn rampant corruption under the Marcos regime. They demanded accountability and imprisonment for officials involved in corruption, especially in flood control projects.

Led by youth groups, the alliance TAMA NA (Taumbayan Ayaw sa Magnanakaw at Abusado Network Alliance), and Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, tens of thousands joined the main gathering at Luneta Park in Manila on September 21. People flooded Luneta to demand, "TAMA NA! Stop the thievery! Hold everyone involved accountable!"

Workers, peasants, urban poor, church people, women, teachers, professionals, and other sectors joined the protest.

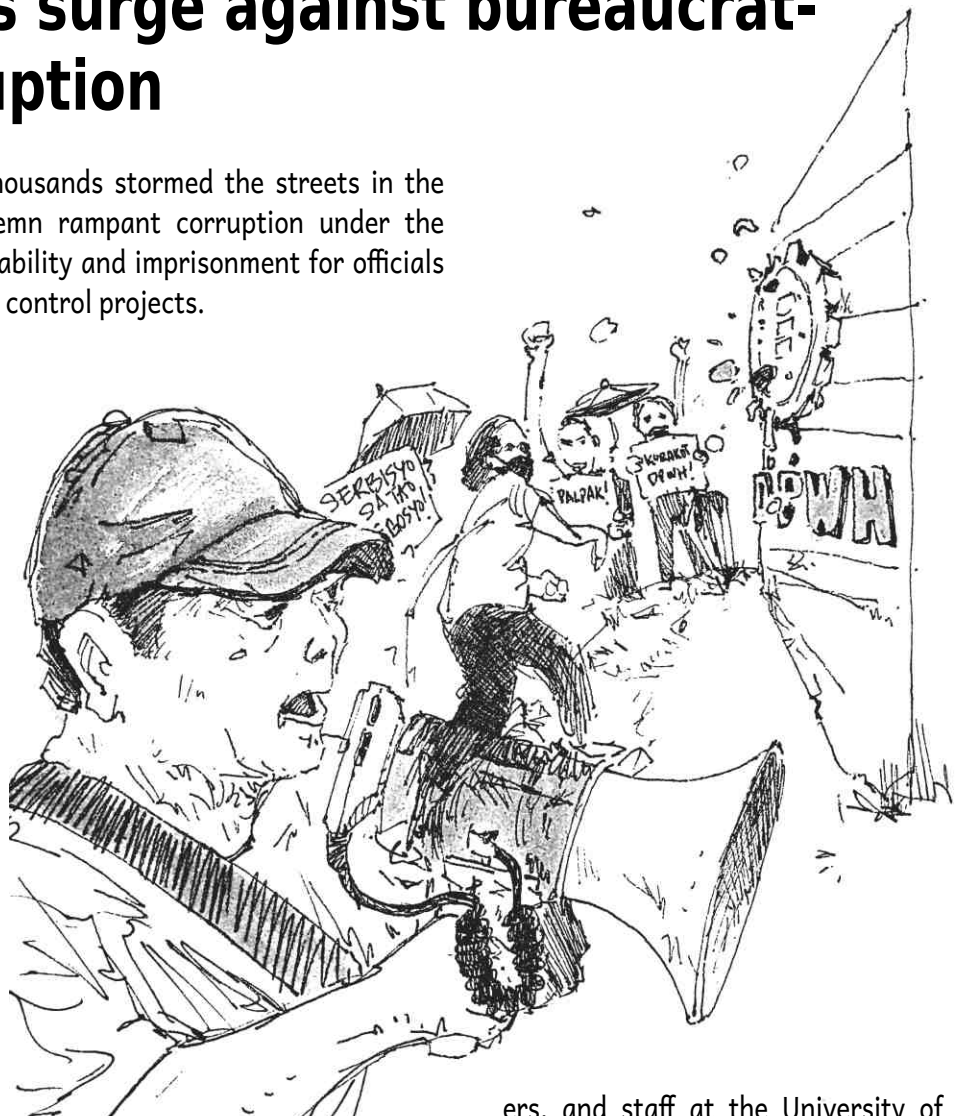
Groups of cyclists, rappers, riders, drag queens, and others attended their protest for the first time. Representatives of progressive parties, mass leaders, priests, and victims of floods and disasters spoke during the program.

"The exposed corruption proves the scourge of bureaucrat capitalism where politicians exploit their positions and influence to expand their wealth and power," Bagong Alyansang Makabayan declared.

They identified Ferdinand Marcos Jr as the primary culprit for the appalling corruption in flood control projects. The group condemned Marcos' hypocrisy for feigning ignorance about corruption when he himself proposed, signed, and implemented the national budget. Bayan will march to Mendiola to hold Marcos accountable.

They concurrently hold Sara Duterte and Rodrigo Duterte accountable for squandering confidential and intelligence funds, the Pharmally scam, and other corruption cases. They are part of the country's systemic corruption.

Aside from Luneta and Mendi-



ola, actions also took place at the EDSA People Power Monument in Metro Manila.

Elsewhere in the country, demonstrations and activities were held in Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Benguet, Cagayan, Isabela, Pampanga, Bulacan, Oriental and Occidental Mindoro, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Albay, Sorsogon, Negros Occidental and Oriental, Iloilo, Capiz, Antique, Aklan, Bohol, Cebu, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Misamis Oriental, Davao del Sur, and South Cotabato.

Broad protest movement

Before the mass gatherings at Luneta and EDSA, the youth and other democratic sectors showed broad participation in condemning corruption. Different creative forms of protest took place across the Philippines.

These actions included class walkouts and boycotts last week by more than 16,000 students, teach-

ers, and staff at the University of the Philippines in Los Baños (7,000), Diliman (5,000), Baguio (1,800), Cebu (1,000), Manila (600), Mindanao (600), Pampanga (200), Visayas (200), and Tacloban (120). Pickets and demonstrations also spread to more than 40 of the country's largest public and private universities: Ateneo de Manila University (2,000), Saint Louis University (1,000), Cavite State University (400), Bulacan State University, Tarlac State University, Bicol University, Mindoro State University, Visayas State University, Mindanao State University-GenSan, Xavier University, and schools under the One Taft Alliance.

National and local groups held almost daily pickets in Metro Manila, including in Quezon City, Manila, Navotas City, Caloocan City, Muntinlupa City, Taguig City, and Marikina City. In towns such as Hagonoy, Bulacan, residents gathered in streets to condemn the government's failed response to

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Struggles against destructive mining and dredging

Resistance of residents against destructive mining and dredging have recorded victories and continued in recent weeks in Ilocos Sur, Kalinga, Nueva Vizcaya, Mindoro and Sorsogon.

In Ilocos Sur, the people's collective action compelled the local government to speak out and order a stop to the destructive dredging operations of the Isla Verde Mining and Development Company on the province's lower Abra River estuary. On September 2, the local government announced stopping the operation because of the communities' united and relentless protest.

Kalinga indigenous people succeeded in junking the bogus Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for the Saltan Dam project of the Australian company JBD Water Power Inc. Residents learned about this on September 15 when they also filed petitions

with the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples to cancel the FPIC for the Saltan Dam and the Upper Tabuk Hydropower Project (UTHP). They were also informed that the FPIC for the UTHP might likewise be revoked and canceled.

In Nueva Vizcaya, residents of Barangay Bitnong, Dupax del Norte barricaded their land starting September 17 to block the entry of United Kingdom-based company Woggle Corporation's mining equipment. The people's widespread opposition to the planned exploration temporarily suspended the company's operation.

In Oriental Mindoro, a prayer rally was held on September 6 at the Gloria public market to op-

pose dredging on the island. Various associations, organizations, churches, politicians, and residents from Calapan City to Bansud joined the protest. They said dredging severely damages the coastline and threatens fisherfolk's livelihood.

On September 10, Sorsogon residents succeeded in forcing the suspension of the Siating Construction and Development Corporation's permit for quarrying stone and sand in Barangay San Roque, Bulusan. The governor based the decision on the position paper submitted by the San Roque Ecological Initiative of Barangay San Roque. Residents said the quarry was illegal because there was no public consultation. It was also located near Bulusan Volcano Natural Park (BVNP), which is a protected area.

From page 3

constant flooding that has hardly subsided for almost the entire year. Around 6,000 residents of Pampanga also marched against corruption. Transport groups staged multi-day strikes. Citizens expressed outrage by storming and hurling mud and paint at the offices of government agencies and contractors involved in corruption.

Protests during lunch breaks and at workday's end were held by at least 16 unions under Kilusang Mayo Uno including Nexperia Phils, PUP Janitors, Philfoods Fresh-Baked Products, Pambato Cargo Forwarders, Daiwa Seiko Philippines Corp, and many others. They chant: "Hold commander-in-thief Marcos accountable!" Church groups also rang bells, held prayer rallies, lit candles, hung and pasted streamers and posters, and created

songs, raps, protest dances, zumba, fun runs, and other forms of action.

Condemnation of corruption also took shape in the impromptu

formation of networks, alliances, and organizations at different levels. The protest movement carried a clear message: demand justice and accountability.



NPA strike AFP troopers and camp in Negros Occidental and Quezon

AMID THE INTENSIFYING and continuous Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)'s military operations in the countryside, the New People's Army (NPA) carried out armed actions and active defense in Negros, Quezon, and Mindoro.

In Negros Occidental, the NPA-Northern Negros (Roselyn Jean Pelle Command) fired at the 79th IB troopers operating in Purok 5, Barangay XI (Gawahon), Victorias City on the night of September 14. Several soldiers protecting land grabbing landlords were wounded.

In Quezon, the NPA-Quezon (Apolonio Mendoza Command) again opened fire at the newly built 85th IB camp in Barangay Cogorin Ibaba, Lopez, on the night of September 4. This was the second NPA attack against the camp, which earned the residents' praise.

The NPA-Southwest Negros (Armando Sumayang Jr Command) recently reported that its unit fired at the 15th IB troopers encamped in Sitio Patol, Barangay Caliling, Cauayan, Negros Occidental in the first week of August.

Active defense. The NPA-Mindoro (Lucio de Guzman Command) preemptively struck attacking 1st IB troopers in Sityo Tugas, Barangay San Vicente, Roxas, Oriental Mindoro on September 9. According to the unit, it promptly monitored the 1st IB forces' presence, allowing Red fighters to swiftly prepare, take position, and open fire.

The battle saw one soldier killed and two others wounded. Meanwhile, the NPA-Mindoro honored Ka Kardo, 33, a Red fighter who was martyred while bravely fighting the fascists.

Peñablanca martyrs honored

THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES commemorated on September 11 the first anniversary of the martyrdom of comrades Ariel Arbitrario (Ka Karl), Erin Sagsagat (Ka Jorly), and Danielle Marie Pelagio (Ka Seed), collectively known as the Peñablanca 3. The three were hors de combat who were willfully and brutally killed by the mercenary 502nd IB in Barangay Baliuag, Peñablanca, Cagayan.

To honor their lives, immeasurable heroism, and contribution to the national democratic revolution, the revolutionary forces of Cagayan Valley held a tribute with the theme, "Let the golden heroism of our martyrs shine! Rectify and continue the path of revolution they pursued!"

They paid the highest tribute to the Peñablanca 3. Their lives and struggles as people's fighters were recalled. Various groups and individuals presented poems and songs during the tribute. Among those presented were the poems "Binhi ng Paglaya" by Amanda Echanis, "Tagubilin at Habilin" by Jose Lacaba, and "Hukbo ng Maralita" by Kerima Tariman. The NPA-Cagayan Valley also produced a video tribute with a recitation of the poem "Silang mga Walang Kamatayan" by Emil Magalat. The program concluded with the singing of "Mangahas" and "Awit ng Pag-asa." They were truly extraordinary inspirations, and their immortal greatness will never fade! kadakilaan!

NPA launches Advanced Party Course amid AFP attacks

RED FIGHTERS OF the New People's Army-Mindoro (Lucio De Guzman Command) successfully completed the Advanced Party Course despite the fascist AFP's intense attacks. Most of the students came from the ranks of peasants and national minorities. The study course was held from July 29 to August 10.

The study aimed to raise political awareness and strengthen further the resolve of the people's army. Its success was achieved with the help of local forces and people, and Red fighters who provided security and support. Unit commander Ka Jomar said, "The study succeeded because of the comrades' sharp reading of the situation, in unity with the masses."

Protest against US military bases in the Philippines

Various groups led by Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) staged protests in front of the US Embassy in Pasay City on September 16 to condemn the growing presence of American troops, weapons, war games, and US military bases in Philippine territory. The protest also marked the 34th anniversary of the historic expulsion of US military bases from the Philippines.

On September 16, 1991, more than 170,000 patriotic Filipinos gathered in front of the Senate to call for the rejection of the extension of the RP-US Military Bases Agreement. According to Bayan, the country now faces an alarming reversal of that victory. In the succeeding years and regimes, various agreements and legal bases were formed for the reentry of US military forces into the Philippines. These include the Visiting Forces Agreement and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which paved the way for the reestablishment of US military bases in the country.

Rectification movement in building Negros mass organization

Marcia residents remember the decades-long support of the Party and the people's army for their community. Red fighters have long been their comrades. With the Party's guidance, they studied Philippine Society and Revolution, special courses, and other studies that consolidated and mobilized the entire village. They resolved the problem of their ancestors against bandit groups in the area that brazenly seized their products and killed their family members and children defenselessly. The leaders of this group were punished.

Under the Second Great Rectification Movement, they launched the anti-feudal struggle against the local landlords. They succeeded in ending the latter's exploitative practices. They won the struggle to stop giving landlords a share of their harvest. With the help of comrades, simple cooperation became their practice in production work and other tasks in the village.

They said they could not have achieved justice without the Party, the people's army, and the entire revolutionary movement.

Rectification and advancement

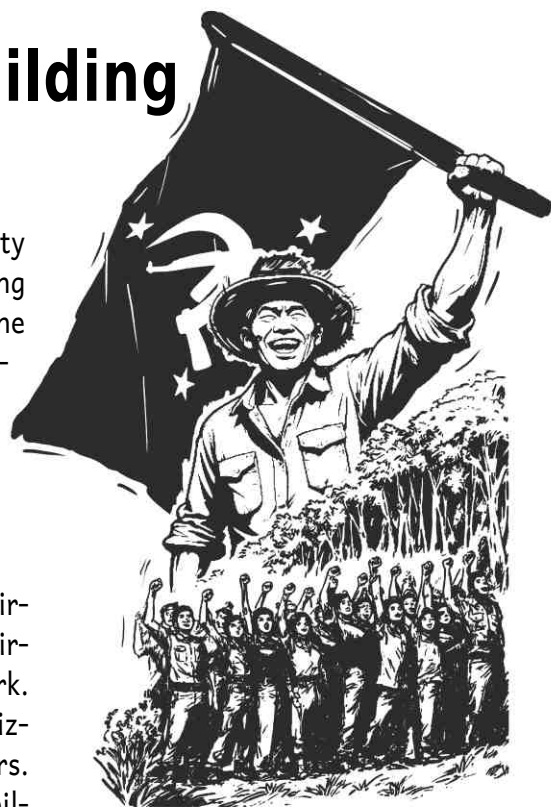
While identifying the errors and weaknesses in the Party, the Army, and the mass organizations, the people of Marcia rebuilt their chapter of the Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM). They conducted criticism and self-criticism. They criticized the PKM's slow formation and the flash in the pan style of mass work. They said they failed to conduct mass base expansion. Repeated courses in PADEPA and others did not complement the current problems facing the village and its people. The Party, the Army, and the whole revolutionary movement also carried out self-criticism for their contributions to the overall setbacks in past years.

Concluding the assembly, they

held elections to choose a chairperson and officers as vice chairpersons for various fields of work. They elected the former organizing committee leaders as officers. "We must uphold the responsibility entrusted by the people of the village," vowed the newly elected committee.

The PKM immediately presented a one-year program to raise the level of the mass organization. They aimed to build the revolutionary committee in the village within six months. Before this, they would successively establish the full mass organizations of the youth, women, and cultural workers. They would also carry out recovery work and expand the mass base to give members a broad area of work, and the New People's Army a space for maneuverability while it is overcoming self-constriction and over-concentration.

The organization also aimed to consolidate all forces simultaneously through education and propaganda work. It would emphasize the study of PADEPA (National Democratic School), Rebolusyon (the Party theoretical journal), courses on people's war, and others. It also seeks to strengthen the people's militia and other guerrilla units as NPA reserve forces. They recognized its importance as an additional armed force



in punishing traitors and fascist enemies, and in seizing weapons and other military logistics from successful tactical offensives.

They aspire to complete social investigation work and to continue the successful anti-feudal movement from the past against exploitative landlords and their descendant new landlord type in their area.

Ka Jetro, one of the mass leaders who attended, said "Our successful establishment of the PKM in the village today proves that the revolutionary movement firmly stands in the countryside." As we now plant the seeds of the organs of political power in our guerrilla front, our comrades are surely doing the same in other guerrilla fronts across the archipelago, he added.

Upon returning home, the participants carried with them their new responsibilities and a burning determination to achieve national freedom and genuine democracy.

(Read the first part, PKM chapter established amid military operations in Negros, Ang Bayan, September 7, 2025)

AB

Recorded cases of arrests and harassment by state forces

Armed state forces relentlessly spread violence against the people who stand for their rights.

Artillery shelling. From late at night on September 9 until the morning of September 10, the 203rd IBde strafed and fired artillery in Sitio Tugas and nearby communities in Barangay San Vicente, Roxas, Oriental Mindoro. The strafing and shelling targeted not only the forests but also farmlands, the Mangyan indigenous communities, and areas they suspected as withdrawal route of the people’s army unit that they clashed with prior.

This forced the evacuation of hundreds of Mangyan indigenous people, including children, women, and the elderly from Sitio Tugas and Sitio Swerte of Barangay San Vicente and nearby households.

Arrests. On September 16, police arrested four residents of Catmon, Malabon City on charges of perjury and grave coercion, while another person implicated in the case surrendered. Those detained were members of Sandigan Nagkakaisang Mamamayan sa Upper Catmon who oppose the planned demolition and land grabbing in the barangay.

Harassment. In recent weeks, police surveiled and summoned seven Amihan-Cagayan members for interrogation and pressured them to cut links from their organization. Among them was women’s leader Emilia Ventula.

In Negros Occidental, state forces reportedly raided homes and threatened two farmers in Barangay Macagahay, Moises Padilla and Barangay Marcelo, Calatrava. They did the same in the homes of residents in Barangay Linantuyan and Barangay Trinidad in Guihulngan City. The state forces arrived in the middle of the night, subjected them to interrogation, and aimed guns at them.

In Panay, the 3rd IB accused Paghugpong sang mga Mangunguma sa Panay kag Guimaras (PAMANGGAS) leader Lucia Capaducio of being a rebel "at large" after the martyrdom of her son, a Red fighter. AB

Postponement of Duterte’s case hearing at the ICC dismays victims

VICTIMS, THEIR LAWYERS and supporters expressed deep disappointment at the decision of the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to postpone the scheduled confirmation of the crimes against humanity case against Rodrigo Duterte on September 23. The court upheld the lawyers’ claim that Duterte was “unfit to stand trial.” The ICC prosecution said Duterte’s own children state that their father is of sound mind.

Since Duterte was placed under ICC custody, his lawyers have actively pushed to delay and eventually dismiss the case against him. They submitted a series of petitions to block the confirmation of the charges.

The victims strongly oppose these schemes. They call for the immediate continuation of the hearing.



Groups form Manindigan Network.

Religious leaders, church people, human rights groups, and others came together to form the Manindigan Network, an alliance that vow to stand against violations of human rights and international humanitarian law under the Marcos regime, on September 6 at the Shalom Center in Manila. On September 12, Manindigan-Central Luzon was also established at the Saint Scholastica’s Academy in San Fernando, Pampanga, its first regional chapter.

Struggle of Cebu delivery riders.

Maxim delivery riders and members of Piston Cebu trooped to the LTO Central Visayas Office on September 15 to demand the release of their licenses and motorcycles confiscated by authorities. They denounced the harassment and unjust actions of the agency against Maxim riders.

Residents condemn Israeli occupation in Siargao.

Around 80 residents of Siargao protested on the Sunset Bridge in Catangnan on September 14 to condemn the Israeli’s ongoing genocide in Gaza, gradual occupation of their island, and plan to build a Chabad House there. They also launched a petition-signing campaign against the construction of the Chabad House and have so far gathered 3,550 signatures.

Corruption in budget for 2026 opposed.

National democratic organizations protested in front of the Senate on September 10 to denounce the railroading of the Office of the President’s budget in congress under the pretext of “parliamentary courtesy.” According to the groups, the budget for 2026 is riddled with corruption. The budget for AFP modernization, confidential and intelligence funds, and NTF-Elcac increased, while the budget for health services was cut and the budget for education saw nearly no increase.



NO ENROLLEES IN UP-BAGUIO'S ROTC

proving student rejection of the militarist program.

32%

only of flood control projects were made public by the Marcos regime on its website "Report to the President," which now serves as the basis of investigations; the data is incomplete and the selection process for these lacked transparency.

Source: Ibon Foundation

₱21 MILLION

was "contributed" by 2 flood control project contractors to Ferdinand Marcos' presidential campaign; ₱19.9 million to Sara Duterte. After assuming office, these contractors were rewarded with large public contracts.

Source: PCIJ



2.4%

only of the total 2026 budget or ₱153.9 billion is allocated for agriculture, of which ₱16 billion is for anomalous **farm-to-market roads**. This is less than half of the 6% allocated to the military, and far from the 23.6% allotted for corruption-ridden infrastructure projects.

₱735B

was allocated by the Duterte regime for **flood control** projects in his 6-year term, increasing from ₱64 billion in 2016 to ₱128 billion in 2022.



Gabriela Women's Party

was proclaimed as the **64th party-list representative** after the Comelec decided to complete the legally mandated 20% party-list representation in Congress.

8

environmental defenders were recorded as **willfully killed and forcibly disappeared** in the Philippines in 2024, making the Philippines the "deadliest country" in Asia for them in over 12 years.

Source: Global Witness



100+

Filipino seafarers were deported by the US' anti-migrant campaign despite having complete documents.

Source: Tanggol Migrante

0 BUDGET

was allocated for Marcos's touted **Zero Balance Billing**; meaning, paying patients, not the state, subsidize the program.

Fair price of tobacco, demanded anew

Tobacco farmers in Ilocos provinces relaunched the campaign to raise the farmgate prices of tobacco to a minimum of ₱128 per kilo. The current farmgate price remains pegged at around ₱97 per kilo, at times plunging to ₱50, depending on classification and quality.

Every two years, the "tripartite talks," supervised by the National Tobacco Administration (NTA), set the farmgate price of tobacco. Tobacco traders, manufacturers, and farmers attend the meeting. The NTA usually favors and listens to the merchants and businessmen in these meetings. Tobacco farmers said the NTA very clearly colludes with companies.

In October 2023, the tobacco farmgate price increased by only ₱3.90-₱9.90 per kilo for 2024-2025. The NTA even boasted that the increase was the highest in the past two decades. The last ₱10-per-kilo increase happened in 2008-2009.

A new round of consultations or Pre-Tripartite Conference is being launched this September for the price increase set for 2026-2027.

Ignored and repressed

In Ilocos, the NTA did not invite and refused to allow the Stop Exploitation-KMP members to participate and express their side in the meeting held in Candon City on September 11. Stop Exploitation staged a picket at the meeting and asserted their right to participate.

Their persistence pressured the local NTA to let in group representatives and hear their call. "There is no to-

bacco industry without the farmers," the group's spokesperson Julie Balangue said.

Not only were they ignored, but peasant leaders who attended the meeting also experienced outright repression from state forces. Days after the meeting, police visited the house of Kalipunan dagiti Mannalon Ken Mangngalap iti Probinsya ti Ilocos Sur leader Teresita Taliboguen in Barangay Maradodon, Cabugao.

The police failed to meet Taliboguen, but according to the group, the police clearly intended to intimidate and stop her from actively participating in actions for the rights and welfare of Ilocos Sur farmers.

Fair price

To avoid losses, tobacco farm-

ers need to sell their produce at more than ₱128 per kilo, which is far from the current minimum price of ₱81-₱97. Farmers insist that increasing the buying price of tobacco is only fair because production costs and labor expenses also keep rising.

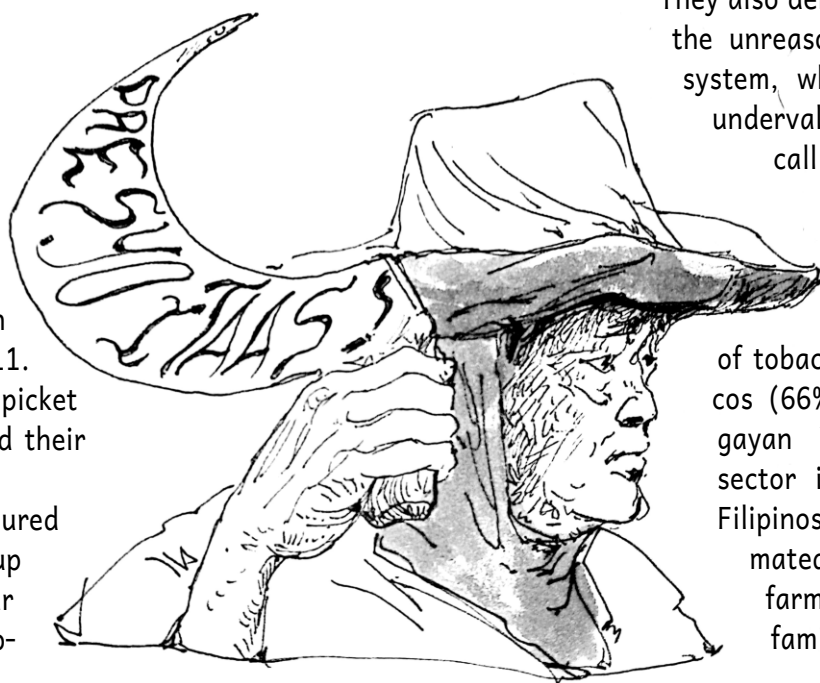
According to a study by Ilocos peasant group Stop Exploitation, tobacco farmers spend 232 days on the entire process of planting until selling. They spend at least ₱91,877 on production and usually pay around ₱13,500 as rent for one hectare of farmland. On top of that are expenses for workers' food and other emergency costs.

The price increase will also support the daily needs of a five-member peasant family. Based on the group's study, a family requires at least ₱739.75 per day to meet necessities.

This year, tobacco farmers are pushing for an increase of ₱16.96-₱69.98 in the price of batek, native, Virginia, and Burley tobacco.

They also demand the removal of the unreasonable classification system, which solely aims to undervalue prices. They also call for better conditions in tobacco contract growing.

The majority of tobacco farms are in Ilocos (66%), followed by Cagayan Valley (19%). The sector involves 2.1 million Filipinos, including an estimated 430,000 farmers, farmworkers, and their families.



“Scam hub trafficking,” a new form of deception and slavery of migrants

Recent months have revealed heinous cases of human trafficking of Filipinos forced into "scam hubs" in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. According to state data, at least 695 Filipinos have been rescued this year from these countries.

Scam hub trafficking is a type of trafficking or illegal recruitment for exploitation, where victims deceived by fake job offers are forced into scam hubs or scam farms to work as online scammers for syndicates. Although not every victim experienced trafficking, all workers in scam hubs face violence and abuse to pressure them into committing illegal activities.

Victims are typically forced to engage in "romance scams," where they lure their targets into falling in love, and later persuade them to send money to fake businesses, cryptocurrency, and other fraudulent investments. Their operations target people in countries across Asia, North and South America, and the Middle East. Foreign criminal syndicates manage the scam hubs in collusion with local government officials.

This form of trafficking was first reported in 2015. However, it became rampant and systematic in 2021. Syndicates converted abandoned casinos and hotels into scam hubs. Most scam hubs initially operated in Southeast Asia but later expanded to West Africa, the Middle East, and Central America. The syndicates target workers skilled in information technology and proficient in English.

The Philippines also became a base for scam hubs, hiding behind

Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations or POGO set up in the country. Many of the enslaved workers included Chinese nationals smuggled into the Philippines and Filipinos forced to work as scammers in these facilities.

The harrowing experiences of the victims

Most Filipino victims were enticed to work as customer service representatives in Cambodia and Myanmar with a promised monthly salary of US\$700. When they arrived, their passports and phones were confiscated. They were forced into scam hubs, targeting Filipinos based in the US.

Filipino migrants were treated as slaves and commodities. When they failed to do their jobs or meet quotas, their employers beat them, locked them up without food, and humiliated them. The worst abuses inflicted on them included torture

and electrocution. Other workers were sold to different companies once their employers deemed them "useless."

Although they escaped the scam hubs, many Filipino victims continue to suffer severe trauma and health problems because of their horrific experiences.

Currently, 148 Filipino migrants are set to be rescued and repatriated to the Philippines from various scam hubs across Asia.

Despite these cases, Filipinos continue to blindly hope and fall prey to fake overseas job offers because of the severe economic crisis and lack of jobs in the country.

Even worse, instead of providing tenured jobs with livable wages, the state's Department of Migrant Workers itself acts as "trafficker." It sells cheap Filipino labor overseas in exchange for billions of dollars in remittances while breaking up families and stripping migrants of dignity. It even seeks to use local governments as "recruiters" for foreign countries and companies, despite the endless accounts of exploitation and abuse experienced by Filipino migrants.

As long as poverty remains unresolved and the labor export program that drives forced migration remains in place, the number of victims subjected to violence and abuse by syndicates will continue to grow, exploiting the desperation of migrants who merely want to give their families a better life.

