



EDITORIAL

Corruption amid crisis and pandemic

Amid widespread and seeming endless sufferings of the Filipino people under the pandemic and oppressive lockdowns, the Duterte regime still managed to squander, loot and deny the people their money worth several billions of pesos.

The Filipino people are utterly outraged over the disclosures made by the Commission on Audit (COA) showing government anomalies, especially in handling pandemic funds which, insufficient to begin with, were wasted and squandered. Indicative of widespread and systematic corruption under Duterte, almost all major government agencies were dotted with the COA's red marks. In an attempt to cover-up these anomalies, Duterte browbeated the COA to stop it from publishing its findings.

As tens of thousands die of Covid-19, more than a million infected, and millions upon millions losing jobs and suffering from destituteness and hunger, these anomalies are outrightly criminal and

those responsible must be held accountable. These expose as false the claim that the reactionary state bureaucracy serves the people. In fact, it is a burdern that breaks the people's backs.

The waste and mispriorities of the people's money further worsen the crisis besetting the country and the people's sufferings. The grossly insufficient, squandered and wasted pandemic funds severely incapacitates the country in overcoming the pandemic. There is a severe lack in mass testing, contact tracing, vaccination and efforts to ramp up the capacity of public hospitals, key measures to defeat the pandemic. More than a year has passed, yet health officials remain blind to where and how the disease spreads.

As a consequence government response is always behind the virus and in the end can only resort to repeated lockdowns. By relying on militarist lockdowns as pandemic solution, Duterte is bearing down on the economy and livelihood of ordinary Filipinos.

A large part of these anomalies comprises of unspent funds which Duterte has ordered to be centralized by the Department of Budget and Management. Many believe that this form part of efforts to funnel billions of pesos of funds to Duterte's war chest, to pour into the economy by the end of the year or next year to create the illusion of growth, or to be used to buy votes and loyalty of politicians and to manipulate the election results.

The people are extremely nauseated how Duterte is prioritizing his schemes to perpetuate himself in power in the face of widespread sufferings of the Filipino masses

borne out of his failure of governance and total neglect. The accompanying corruption in handling government funds adds to the people's burden.

Duterte's "anti-corruption" pretensions are thoroughly exposed as hollow. Hitting at small bureaucrats is merely a show to conceal large-scale corruption. The worse of the corrupt are his closest factotums, generals and most trusted officials who despite being exposed and condemned are allowed to continue to squander and waste the people's money. The regime reeks from its putridity.

Because of Duterte's worsening corruption, utter neglect and cling to power, there is a growing possibility of a worse public health, economic and political crisis breaking out in the coming weeks and months.

As more potent mutations of Covid-19 as the Delta variant emerges, there is a big threat of the pandemic worsening beyond the capacity of the health system. More and more nurses are resigning due

to exhaustion in work and in waiting for their benefits.

Hospitals are running out of facilities and people to man these, thus many falling sick are could no longer be treated. Yet, repeated lockdowns are still the regime's primary answer, which is bound to further bring down the economy and the people's lives.

The Duterte regime is wearing down the people's patience. The people's blood roils over how the corrupt bureaucrat capitalists prioritize their power, their vices, their wallets and pockets, even as the people suffer prostrate. The people are seeking where and how to pour their seething anger against the regime.

Progressive and revolutionary forces bear the responsibility of



bringing together the people's outrage and turn this into a powerful weapon for change. They must reach out to the millions seeking guidance and light as to the path for defending their rights and interests. They must overcome the restrictions of the lockdown and fascist rule in order to arouse, organize and mobilize the masses in a big way.

The Duterte regime strains to disunite the people through deception, lies, threats and violence. This must be matched by untiring efforts to unite the youth, the workers, peasants, the poor, women, nurses and doctors, teachers and other ordinary employees. Different sectors must be firmly united to manifest at all times the deep-seated anger over the current crisis caused by Duterte and his minions.

Anticipate any rapid twist or change in the situation and seize every opportunity to bring together the strength of tens of thousands of people in the streets and array the broadest range of forces to confront the corrupt, failed, treacherous and fascist regime.

As guide, the Party must teach that, on the one hand, systematic corruption in the Duterte government further worsens the crisis, the poverty and suffering of the people. On the other hand, this is also a symptom of the irresolvable and worsening crisis of the ruling system that can only be ended through revolutionary armed overthrow of the reactionary, puppet and bureaucrat-capitalist state. AB



Vol. LII No. 16 | August 21, 2021

Ang Ang Bayan is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray, English and Spanish.

Ang Bayan welcomes contributions in the form of articles and news items.

Readers are encouraged to send feedback and recommendations for improving our newspaper.



Contents

Editorial: Corruption amid crisis & pandemic	1
Anomalous utilization of pandemic funds	3
Hunger and hardships under ECQ	4
AFP's despicable campaign to vilify NPA	5
Residents foil construction AFP camp	5
Ka Parts Bagani, people's artist	6
8 armed actions in 6 provinces	6
Protests	6
Grabbing of Masbate farmlands	7
Increase in fertilizer prices	7
Charges against 9 activists dropped	8
Soldiers murder Mangyan leader	8
The illusion of 11.8% GDP growth	10
Sa madaling salita	10
US driven out of Afghanistan	10

Ang Bayan is published fortnightly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines

Anomalies in the utilization of pandemic funds

Rodrigo Duterte faced a backlash after he criticized and intimidated the Commission on Audit (COA) on August 16 to stop it from publicizing reports revealing anomalous use of pandemic funds by various agencies of the reactionary government. On the next day, Department of Health (DOH) Sec. Francisco Duque III ranted that his agency was "destroyed" by COA after exposing its anomalous utilization of health funds during the critical times of the Covid-19 pandemic. This neglect and the squandering of public funds is criminal especially amid the pandemic. This is while more than a hundred thousand lives have been lost, and while millions have lost their jobs and plunged into poverty.

The COA flagged the DOH for deficiencies in the management of pandemic funds, as well as irregularities and delays in the procurement of medical equipment and supplies.

In particular, the COA flagged deficiencies in the agency's management of pandemic funds worth over ₱67.32 billion in 2020. According to the commission, approximately ₱11.89 billion allocated to improve the health system were unobligated due to the DOH's shortcomings. The COA also questioned over the ₱95.15-million worth of expired or near-expiry medicines and other medical supply in its inventory. It also flagged the DOH for overpricing up to ₱1 billion worth of face masks and face shields procured by the Department of Budget Management (DBM) using pandemic funds. The DOH reportedly transferred back ₱42 billion in pandemic funds to the DBM for the procurement of medical supplies without appropriate documentation.

Additionally, the DOH had no proper documentation for ₱539.29 million used to compensate medical workers; ₱275.9 million for "meal allowances" and ₱11.66 million for the death and sickness pay of health workers. It also failed to document about ₱1.4 billion in donations received in the same year.

Department of Social Welfare and Development. The department was flagged over ₱780.71 million of unused funds for its Social Amelio-

ration Program (SAP) that could have benefited 139,300 individuals. It was also questioned for distributing ₱4.36 billion in SAP funds in six regions without proper documentation. In sum, the department recorded a deficiency of ₱5.46 billion.

Department of Labor and Employment. Auditors flagged the agency for poor insufficient internal control measures in granting aid to workers and migrants who were displaced by the pandemic. They noticed several irregularities such as excessive payments of aid to 213 beneficiaries amounting to ₱1 million. They also found out that some beneficiaries were not able to receive any aid or complained to have received less than the reported amount of aid. Around ₱22.34 million in unclaimed financial assistance also remain deposited in money remittance centers. The department was also called out for ₱1.57 billion worth of unliquidated cash advances to workers.

Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board. Only 1% of the ₱59 million budget for Service Contracting Program which supposedly aims to temporarily employ drivers displaced by quarantine restrictions was utilized by the agency. Not even half of the 60,000 target driver-beneficiaries



were registered in the said program.

Department of Agriculture. Around ₱2.2 billion in Bayanihan 2 funds allocated to aid small farmers who were affected by the pandemic was not utilized by the department. Contrarily, it was flagged for excessive payment of aid to farmers amounting to ₱250.53 million under its four programs. This includes aid given to "unqualified farmers" and double or triple payment of aid to 14,058 beneficiaries. The department was also called out for overpricing farm inputs which it distributes to farmers.

Department of Education. The department was flagged over delayed release of ₱1.39 billion to school divisions amid the need for funds due to the implementation of distance learning. Only ₱916 million (41%) of the ₱2.23-billion fund allocated for its six regional offices have been obligated, while only ₱29 million for seven other regional offices remain unobligated. COA also called out the department over the flawed, incomplete and slow production and delivery of learning modules for distance learning.

Hunger and hardships under ECQ

The quarantine level in the National Capital Region (NCR), Bataan and Laguna was lowered to modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) from August 21 to 31 after two weeks of being under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), the strictest form of lockdown. The decision was made through secret ballot voting by members of the Inter-Agency Task Force without publicizing their basis.

The announcement was made after the Department of Health (DOH) reported more than 14,000 new Covid-19 infections on August 19. The following day, new infections rose further to 17,231, the highest since the pandemic. Before the two-week ECQ, daily cases were only at 9,000. According to the department, this translates into a positivity rate of 24% out of 60,000 individuals tested. This shows the country's limited testing capacity as a 5% positivity rate was set as a standard to gauge if a country was doing enough testing.

Over 1.8 million individuals have been infected with Covid-19 in the country as of August 20. More than 10,000 have been infected daily in the past nine days, and it is expected to rise further in succeeding weeks.

In Metro Manila, 73% of hospital beds for critical patients are already occupied, as well as 60% of isolation beds and 67% of ward beds. The utilization rate of ventilation machines is also already at 61%. Instead of immediately constructing more facilities to accommodate more patients, the IATF ordered hospitals to utilize hospital beds intended for non-Covid-19 patients to accommodate Covid-19 patients. This was carried out while refusing to hire more hospitals, forcing overworked doctors and nurses to take on more work.

However, it appears that the real reason why the quarantine status was lowered instead of extending the ECQ is the lack of funds for aid which Department of Interior

and Local Government Sec. Gen. Eduardo Año himself admitted.

Earlier, many capitalists opposed plans to extend the lockdown. They said that many businesses have already closed down, and that more will close down should the ECQ be extended. Data by the National Economic Development Authority indicate that approximately ₱150 billion in revenues was lost weekly because of the lockdown. Given that the NCR comprises a third of the economy, this severely impacts the local economy.

Due to successive lockdowns since 2020, approximately 9.2 million to 13.5 million Filipinos have lost their jobs or became underemployed amid the pandemic. On top of this, approximately 444,000 have also lost their jobs during the two-week ECQ.

Instead of being strengthened, the public health system and the condition of health workers continues to deteriorate. According to the Philippine Nurses Association, approximately 40% of all local nurses resigned from their jobs since last year because of being overworked, underpaid, and not given appropriate benefits such as the special risk allowance and active hazard pay. Of the approximately 30,000 nurses working in private hospitals, approximately 13,000 are contractuals. Nurses threatened to resign en masse due to being overworked and denied of their benefits.

Lawmakers also criticized the



token ₱4.5-billion aid which Año bragged about. Data by online data aggregator iPrice indicate that Manila City has the second highest cost for rent among six cities in Southeast Asia covered by its research, next to Singapore. Citing the study, Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate cited said that the average monthly cost of living in NCR is ₱50,800, or ₱28,800 excluding rent. Each individual needs approximately ₱7,000 weekly to survive. The ₱1,000 subsidy to individuals is even less than the two-day salary received by a minimum wage earner in NCR, and only barely higher than the daily living wage of ₱1,058 for a family of five. Even an aid of ₱4,000 per family is not enough to make ends meet. Data by iPrice indicate that a family of four needs at least ₱57,600 every two weeks to live decently, greater than ₱4,000.

Amid this, the regime pushed for the implementation of restrictions on people's movement and drove them to the wall in the name of the pandemic. In NCR alone, the police arrested 108,777 individuals for allegedly violating health protocols primarily because of economic reasons. In the evening of August 7, a barangay tanod gunned down scavenger Eduardo Geñoga Sabado in Barangay 156 in Tondo, Manila after being apprehended for violating curfew restrictions. Geñoga suffered from a mental illness. **AB**

AFP's despicable campaign to vilify NPA's commitment to women's rights

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in recent year has campaigned to vilify the New People's Army (NPA) by peddling despicable lies about "abuses" against women. It based its allegations on "evidences" of birth control pills, condoms and pregnancy test kits confiscated in NPA camps during encounters which they claim as "proof" of "sex slavery."

This is despite the fact that these are medical supplies for responsible family planning. Contrary to lies peddled by the AFP, the use of these supplies proves the promotion of women's rights to reproductive health in the revolutionary movement. The lies are not only malicious but proves the reactionary army's bigotry and contempt of women.

Members of the NPA actively promotes women's rights and welfare, especially those of women Red fighters. This is stipulated in the Eight Points of Attention of the NPA: "Do not take liberties with women." This principle is upheld in all guerrilla fronts, especially in relationships and marital affairs. Those who violate this are meted with appropriate disciplinary action.

The revolutionary movement has policies in terms of marriage, as well as annulment and divorce. Part of this is the recognition of women and couple's rights to reproductive health and family planning in the people's army. NPA units allots resources to ensure needs for contraception. Discussions on establishing revolutionary families and contraception are actively held in the people's army.

AFP's record of abuses against women

The AFP and NPA are direct opposites in terms of upholding women's rights. Rodrigo Duterte, the AFP commander-in-chief himself, ordered to shoot women Red

fighters in the vagina. He is notorious for misogyny, and for inciting soldiers and policemen to commit crimes against women.

AFP abuses against women and minors are widespread. These are usually perpetrated during the conduct of military Retooled Community Support Program (RCSP) operations wherein they encamp in communities for long periods of time.

Last year, it was reported that soldiers summoned women residents of Sitio Tapayanon, Barangay Gupitan, Davao del Norte every Saturday to pick who they will rape. This resulted in numerous cases of unplanned pregnancies in the said community which devastate residents' families.

In 2018, a soldier of the 54th IB raped a 16-year old girl in Tinoc, Ifugao. During the same year, an-



other soldier reportedly sexually harassed another woman in Barangay Lob-ong, Asipulo.

In Ifugao, soldiers are also notorious for having extramarital affairs with women. A soldier also reportedly peed in front of a girl minor, while another shouted, "Virgins here are worth only two hundred pesos!" in a community in Asipulo.

In interview published by Daba-Daba, the revolutionary publication of Panay, parents said, "We are more confident leaving our daughters in an NPA platoon than leaving them in the presence of soldiers." **AB**

Residents foil construction of military camps in Quezon anew

BARANGAY COUNCILORS AND watchmen of San Francisco-B, Lopez, Quezon led the mass action to stop the planned construction of a military camp in their community on August 7. Residents collectively evicted the soldiers who were deployed in the area to construct a detachment. Barangay officials said residents immediately complained upon hearing the news of the military's plan.

This was the fifth time that residents in Quezon succeeded in evicting military camps in their community since May. Prior to this, residents already evicted soldiers from their communities in Sta. Elena and Cawayan in Lopez; and Vista Hermosa and P. Herrera in Macalelon.

Ka Parts Bagani, Red fighter and people's artist

Joint elements of the 5th Special Forces Battalion and the local police summarily executed Jhon Niebres Peñaranda, more known as Parts Bagani, 54, an official of the New People's Army (NPA) in the Southern Mindanao Region, and renowned revolutionary artist, in Barangay Cannery Site, Polomolok, South Cotabato on August 16. He was unarmed and incapable of fighting back.

Ka Parts is known in and outside the revolutionary movement as a leading revolutionary painter and illustrator based in the NPA. He came from the petty-bourgeois class but offered his entire life and intellect to defend the oppressed masses. While holding an armalite and performing military and mass work, he produced artworks which reflect the aspirations of the people for freedom from oppression, exploitation, hunger and poverty, and for national and social liberation.

While known for his artworks as a revolutionary artist, Ka Parts was

primarily a Red fighter and military cadre of the NPA. He has a rich experience in warfare, in its advances and retreats, in leading tactical offensives and studying the art of war. He knitted his brows when making plans to further strengthen the capacity of the NPA and Red fighters in armed struggle.

He was able to maximize his talent in sketching to draw plans for tactical offensives. His contributions in advancing the armed revolution in Southern Mindanao and other parts of Mindanao are exceptional. AB

8 armed actions in 6 provinces

Units of the New People's Army (NPA) mounted eight offensives in Negros Oriental, Northern Samar, Oriental Mindoro, Surigao del Sur, Capiz and Agusan del Norte from July 25 to August 14. At least eight soldiers were killed in these actions.

An element of the 62nd IB was slain during a harassment operation of the NPA in Negros Oriental on August 11. A policeman was also wounded during the armed operation in Los Angeles, Butuan City on July 27. Another soldier was killed in Barangay Victory, Las Navas in Northern Samar on July 9.

Oriental Mindoro. Four policemen were killed while two others were wounded after being blasted by the NPA-Mindoro in its camp in Barangay Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro on August 4.

The NPA also blasted a military convoy with six vehicles at Sitio Tambangan, Barangay San Juan,

Bulalacao on August 14.

Capiz. The NPA meted out revolutionary justice against Cpl. Frederick Villasis of the 12th IB on August 11 in Barangay Lahug, Tapaz. A Glock pistol was confiscated from him. He was involved in the massacre and mass arrest of Tumandoks on December 30, 2020.

Surigao del Sur. Two elements of the 36th IB were wounded while another was killed during a harassment operation by the NPA-Surigao del Sur along the border of Barangay Bayogo, Madrid on July 25. The NPA also fired at elements of the 75th IB who were scouring Barangay Bolhoon, San Miguel on July 29. AB



Stop quarrying in Negros.

On August 12, farmers appealed for a stop to quarrying operations in Silay City, Negros Occidental. They condemned the indiscriminate and continuing deforestation in the area which has caused flooding and destruction of their farm lands. One of the five quarrying operations in the area is owned by Silay City Mayor Mark Andrew J. Golez.

Coca-Cola lay-offs in Cebu, suspended.

Coca-Cola temporarily suspended its plan to re-trench its workers after an agreement was reached between contractual workers and their principal contractor on August 9 in Mandaue City, Cebu. This was after workers filed a complaint at the National Conciliation and Mediation Board. Their complaints included union busting and inhumane working conditions, wherein workers are forced to take on other tasks aside from theirs.

Protest in Talisay City.

Re-trenched employees of the Talisay City hall and Bacolod City Water District marched to the Civil Service Commission in Bacolod City on August 9 to demand reinstatement.

Haran evacuees return to Talaingod.

The remaining 100 Talaingod Manobos who sought refuge at the UCCP Haran Center in Davao City decided to finally return to their communities on August 9 after seven years. They evacuated in 2014 after their communities were subjected to successive military attacks.

Grabbing of Masbate farmlands in the name of ecotourism

Over 21,000 residents will lose their farmlands and fish farms with the construction of the Masbate International Tourism Enterprise and Special Economic Zone project of the Empark Land Development Inc. The project covers more than 1,854 hectares of agricultural land across seven coastal barangays in the town of Dimasalang and four in Palanas. Prior to the project, residents have long been prohibited from fishing in around 222 hectares of sea and mangrove forests in the area as these were declared marine sanctuaries. However, even these are bound to be destroyed with the construction of the project by Empark.

Rodrigo Duterte touted the program as the biggest tourism project. More than ₱190 billion was invested in the project by Huang Rulun, a Chinese billionaire and owner of Empark who has close links to Duterte. Huang currently faces various cases of corruption in China. At the start of Duterte's term, he also gave ₱1.4 billion for the construction of two drug rehabilitation centers.

Empark began its operations in April 2018 to convert the area into an ecotourism zone which has continued even amid the pandemic. Casino, malls, hotels, a golf course and port are set to rise in the area of this grandiose project. This is on top of 50 other facilities. Given the large and broad scope of the project, its construction is projected to be completed only in 2044.

Tourism for foreign capital

The Duterte regime is pushing to strengthen investments in the tourism industry even as these have rapidly declined during the pandemic. In 2019, around 12.7% of the gross domestic product of the country came from the tourism industry, higher than the 12.3% share it recorded in the previous year. The government gained revenues of ₱466 billion, 21% higher than in the previous year. In 2019, private investments in the tourism industry stood at ₱569.1 billion.

Through the Republic Act

11262, the Duterte regime further opened up the tourism industry to foreign investments. The Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) gave numerous incentives to investors in tourism enterprise zone (TEZ). This includes tax holidays for six up to 12 years, tax and duty free importation of capital investment, equipment and services, carryover as a deduction from the gross income for six years, and other benefits. Investors are also allowed to lease land for up to

75 years.

This is the same offer extended by TIEZA to 12 priority TEZs in nine provinces. This includes 20 tourism clusters in the country targeted by the Department of Tourism to generate a revenue of ₱3.9 trillion by the end of Duterte's term. Within these priority TEZs, at least 2,000 hectares of land and fishing grounds will be sold by TIEZA.

Across the country, the Duterte regime is determined to have all farmlands being cultivated by farmers be placed under a titled in order to sell these to developers. In 2019, Duterte ordered the Department of Agrarian Reform to expedite the process of use conversion of agricultural lands. Aside from being used for tourism projects, these vast lands are sold to capitalist plantations, mining companies, and real estate developers. AB



Increase in fertilizer prices, a bane to farmers

THE KILUSANG MAGBUBUKID ng Pilipinas (KMP) reported last August 12 that the price of fertilizer increase by ₱200-₱400/bag in the last two months. Data by the Department of Agriculture (DA) indicate that the price of prilled urea is ₱1,415.99 per bag, ₱1,393.32 for granular urea, ₱778.79 for ammosul, and ₱1,268.19 for complete. The prices are almost double the prices recorded during the previous year.

Fertilizer is applied to nearly 85% of rice fields and vegetable farms in the country. Farmers called on the DA to investigate the increase in prices, and urged the department not to liberalize the importation of expensive fertilizer. Simultaneous to fertilizer price increases, the price of petroleum products and pesticides increased as well.

Courts and prosecutors junk trumped-up charges against 9 activists

Two regional trial courts and prosecutors successively dismissed trumped-up charges slapped against seven activists in Metro Manila, Albay and General Santos City, and two staff of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

On August 4, the Legazpi Regional Trial Court in Albay dismissed the gun running charge against Pastor Danilo Balucio. It voided the search warrant used by the police in raiding his residence and arresting him last May as this was "not based on personally-verified information."

On August 13, prosecutors also junked the charges of kidnapping and failure to return a minor slapped against youth activists

Elaine Edzel Emocling, Christine Joy Dual, Alex Danday and Alfie Omega. The four were accused of recruiting for the people's army and kidnapping a student activist named "Trisha." The prosecutors clarified that participation in protests is not armed struggle.

On August 12, the General Santos City Regional Trial Court junked the illegal possession of firearms and explosives charges against cou-

ple Edgar and Regina Patulombon who were arrested by the police in 2015 based on planted evidences of firearms and explosives. The charges were dropped because the arresting officers failed to inform the couple of their rights when they were arrested and subjected to investigation.

On August 19, the a court in Quezon City also voided the warrant used by state forces to raid and plant evidences of firearms and explosives in the residence of couple Alexander at Winona Birondo in 2019. Both are staff of the NDFP in the peace negotiations. AB

Soldiers murder Mangyan leader

Three farmers were killed and seven others arrested by armed state agents in the past few weeks.

In Occidental Mindoro, the 203rd IB killed former indigenous leader Baduy de la Cruz at Sitio Cawit, Barangay Gapasan on July 29. He has long been subjected to surveillance and coerced by the military to "surrender."

In Northern Samar, the 20th IB murdered Nilo Ogatcho, barangay captain of Victory, Las Navas, on August 19. The local NPA unit in the area said that the killing was an act of retaliation by the military for the death of a soldier during an NPA offensive in the same barangay on July 9.

Elements of the 63rd IB killed Juddy Ragawdaw, former member of a peasant organization, during the first week of June in Barangay Loog, Basey, Western Samar.

Illegal arrest. The 203rd Brigade and police arrested a farmer identified only as "Ernesto Panganiban" in Barangay Lisap, Bongabong, Oriental Mindoro on August 6. He was arrested by soldiers and policemen to get the ₱4.5-billion bounty for the this invented name.

In Sibale, Romblon, four farmers who were seeking shelter to avoid the typhoon last July 2 were illegally arrested by policemen and coerced to surrender as NPA members. The victims, identified as Nolan Ramos, Benny Hilamon, Marlon Angelo Torres and Ma. Teresa Dioquino, were slapped with trumped up charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

The 62nd IB and 94th IB accosted George Francis and Eduardo Mission, residents of Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental on August 3. Francis is yet to be surfaced while Mission was surfaced at the police station in Binalbagan, Negros Occidental. On August 3, elements of the 94th IB indiscriminately strafed houses of the Ponsiano and Enriquez families at Sitio Tibak, Barangay Santol, Binalbagan.

In Masbate, barangay councilors Virginia Esperanza Cabiles, Jinky Esperanza Villadolid and Dee Madrilejo were arrested in Barangay Talisay, San Fernando on August 12 after being accused of having links with the revolutionary movement. They managed to escape initially but were later arrested in Masbate City. AB

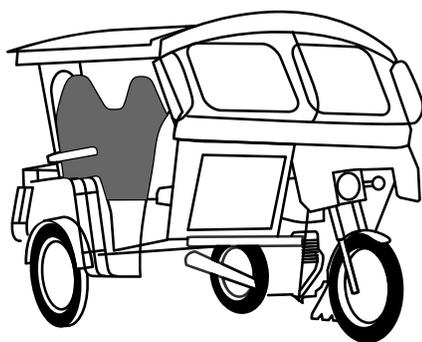
The illusion of 11.8% GDP growth

THE 11.8% INCREASE in the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Philippines during the second quarter of the year is only a rebound from the worst levels. The figure is relative to the 17% GDP decline during the same quarter of the same year, making the slight growth appear bigger. The 2nd quarter GDP growth appears big but is, in fact, only 0.7% higher than the first quarter of the year. It further decelerated by -1.3% during the second quarter. Ibon Foundation projected that the regime will fail to sustain this "bounce" in GDP without resolving the widespread problem of unemployment, low quality jobs, decline or absence of income and financial assistance

At the same time, share of the agricultural sector dropped by 3.3% and 1.5% during the first and second quarter of the year. This is a result of combined measures to fully liberalize the importation of meat and rice, the absence of production subsidy for farmers, the absence of subsidy for farmers, as well as travel restrictions which both affect producers and buyers.

#LetAlicia Speak

Call of youth groups to **expose the abuses suffered by Alicia Lucena** who was **illegally detained by the NTF-ELCAC** in collusion with her mother agent, in a small room in their family home **from April 19 to August 15.**



2,800 tricycle drivers

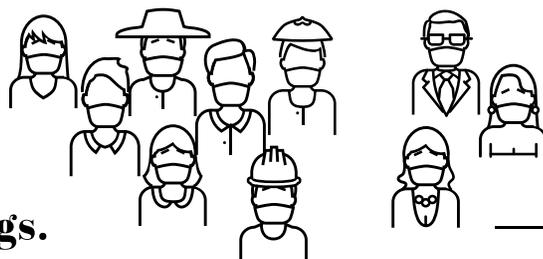
launched the "A Peso Against 174 Reclamation Project" in Dumaguete

It aims to **gather donations** to support continuing protests and activities **against the reclamation project** in the city.

5 TIMES THAT MERALCO INCREASED ELECTRICITY RATES

in the **past 5 months.** In sum, Meralco charged an **additional rate of ₱0.682 per KWh** which is equivalent to ₱136.40 per month to those who consume up to 200 KWh, and ₱341 per month for those who consume up to 500 KWh.

7 out of 10



Filipinos have no savings.

This number of families rose to **2.3 million** in the second quarter of 2021 **from 1.9 million** in the last quarter of 2020.



USS CHARLESTON

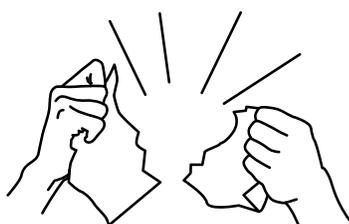
US military vessel which docked in Manila

on August 16. This was the first US vessel which docked in the Philippines since 2019 **after Rodrigo Duterte gave the US the assurance that he will not abrogate the Visiting Forces Agreement.**

Only

2,000

migrants are allowed to return to the Philippines per day. Because of these, tens of thousands of Filipino migrants continue to be stranded abroad and suffer in various parts of the globe.



23 August 1896

Day of the Cry of Pugadlawin

More than 500 Katipuneros led by **Andres Bonifacio** collectively tore their cedula to mark the start of their uprising against Spanish colonialists.

9 new billionaires

emerged during the pandemic period

after making **superprofits** from **development and sales of Covid-19 vaccines.** Their \$19.3-billion combined net worth is enough to vaccinate all people in developing countries.

Source: The People's Vaccine Alliance

US driven out of Afghanistan, Taliban retakes power

The war is over. This was declared by the Taliban last August 16 after its fighters seized Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, and ended the US 20-year occupation and its puppet government. Before the Taliban entered Kabul, the US puppet president Ashraf Ghani already fled the country paving the way for the establishment of a new government. The Taliban ruled the country when the US first mounted its war of aggression in 2001. The group announced that it will establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with its return to power.

The Taliban launched its offensive to retake power last May 4, after the US announced the withdrawal of its combat forces from the country. Within two months, the Taliban seized half of the country's districts, including territories once controlled by its rival warlords. In spite of this, the US belittled the group, saying its "75,000-strong army" will not be able to defeat the 300,000-strong Afghan National Army (ANA) that the US trained, funded and armed.

On August 6, the Taliban seized Zaranj, its first city. Around this time, the US estimated the possibility of the capital falling in 90 days. In reality, the almost unimpeded seizure of Kabul and 20 other town capitals was accomplished within 10 days. This was accompanied with a proselytizing campaign and promises of amnesty to all ANA soldiers. The puppet army did not put up a fight and instead abandoned their posts, surrendered or defected when their cities were attacked.

The US panicked to get their personnel out of the country on August 16 itself. This included 2,500 migrant workers, 132 of whom are Filipinos. As many Afghans and foreign nationals expressed fears of violence, 60 countries and the United Nations called on the Taliban to allow anyone who wants to, leave the country.

Legacy of destruction and poverty

The 20-year US occupation left behind unprecedented destruction and poverty. According to a US re-

search, about 3,487 American soldiers and their allies have died, as well as 4,000 private "contractors," 80,000 Afghan soldiers and more than 84,000 on the "opposition" side in the course of the 2001-2021 "forever war." There are estimates that up to 875,000 civilians were killed. Around 3.5 million were displaced due to encounters.

The US squandered up to \$2.26 trillion public funds from 2001 to 2021. The majority of this (\$933 billion) is under the Department of Defense' Overseas Contingency Operations, previously known as its overseas "counter-terrorism operations."

The US spent \$144.98 billion for reconstruction and \$36.29 billion to establish the puppet government in the first 10 years of occupation alone. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, no less than 20% of these funds were squandered or pocketed by local Afghan officials. This include the \$1-billion fund for the construction of schools inclusive of Afghan girls, a program that was used to justify the US occupation.

The US left the Afghan local economy in tatters. Its gross domestic product averaged only at 2.5% in 2015 to 2019. (Prior to this, its

GDP grew at an average of 8% due to the expansion of military bases.) It fell to a negative 2.8 last 2020.

During the same year, unemployment rose to 37.9%, largely due to the closure of military bases which employed around 40% of the Afghans. (In Kabul, there was a time when 90% of its population was connected to operations of the US embassy and military base.)

The Afghan economy is fragile and dependent on international aid, according to the World Bank. In 2019, 22% of its gross national product was from international agencies. (There was a time when 80% of its national budget and 40% if its GDP was made up of foreign aid.)

There has been no stable infrastructure. Agriculture remained undeveloped even as 60% of the population rely on the sector. Criminal activities such as smuggling and growing of opium poppies, a key ingredient to the illegal production of heroin, run rampant.

Life for Afghans turned for the worse when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Around 75% said that they did not receive any aid from the ousted government. Up to 36% said they experienced a food crisis. Around 72% of the population fell under the poverty line—much higher compared to 55% recorded in 2019. AB

