

ANG

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Editorial

## Resist the reestablishment of US military bases in the Philippines

The Philippines is now a vast US military base. This point was driven home when the US North Arabian fleet docked at Manila Bay from May 15 to 18.

The fleet, which serves as the US' base of operations against Afghanistan, Pakistan and Libya is composed of four ships—the USS Carl Vinson, the USS Shiloh, the USS Bunker Hill and the USS Gridley—and has a personnel of 25,000. The entire fleet is nuclear-powered and in all likelihood, carries nuclear weapons. It is from this fleet that the US launched its operation to assassinate Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on May 1. The fleet brought his body to the open sea where it was later thrown overboard.

In violation of diplomatic protocols, an American jetfighter flew US puppet Benigno Aquino III to the USS Carl Vinson while the fleet was still in international waters. Aquino and his staff were later shown aboard the ship and all agog over a display of US military might by their imperialist master. In coming aboard a US warship, Aquino demonstrated his contempt for the opposition to the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), the presence of American troops in the country and their abuses against the Filipino people.

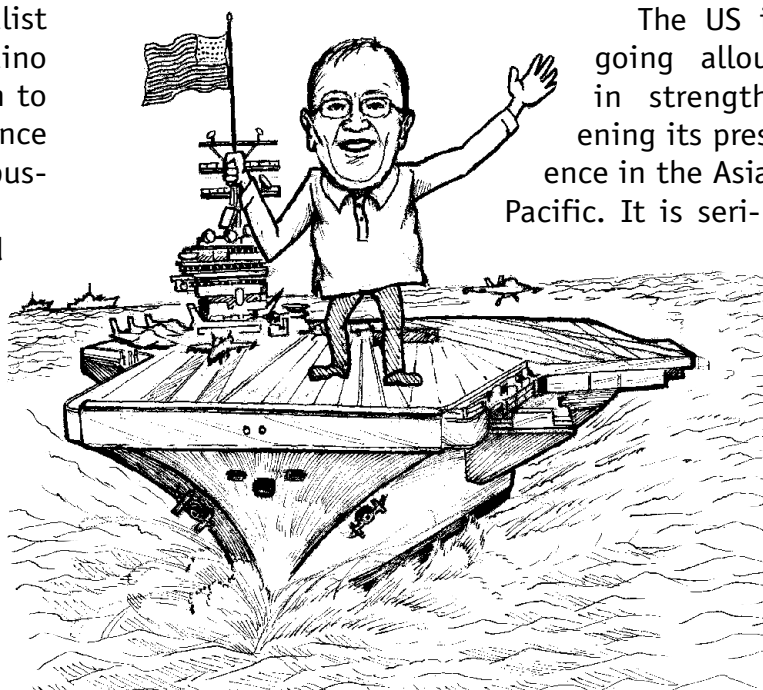
Thousands of American soldiers entered Philippine territory as the fleet docked at Manila Bay. The participation of American troops in games and other "friendly" activities effectively camouflaged other more insidious and illegal activities that were of an interventionist nature and violative of the country's sovereignty.

The American war fleet's docking at Manila Bay once more brings to the fore the US' use of the Philippines as one big military base. The fact that a nuclear-pow-

ered fleet was permitted entry manifests the absence of an independent Philippine foreign policy and the country's subservience to US interests. In allowing US warships to dock in the country, the Aquino government has sent the world the message that the Philippines will always be on the US side, whatever war the latter chooses to wage or engage in.

Aquino's unannounced and unscheduled boarding of the US ship reinforces speculations that secret discussions are underway about US plans to reestablish its military facilities in the Philippines. As recently as April 26, two US senators came to the Philippines to inquire about the state of their former military base in Subic Bay, Olongapo. The US has long been looking for an alternative site in the face of strong and relentless protests against its military base in Okinawa and the abuses committed by its troops stationed in Japan.

The US is going all out in strengthening its presence in the Asia-Pacific. It is seri-



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**Rivalry within the Aquino clique** PAGE 3

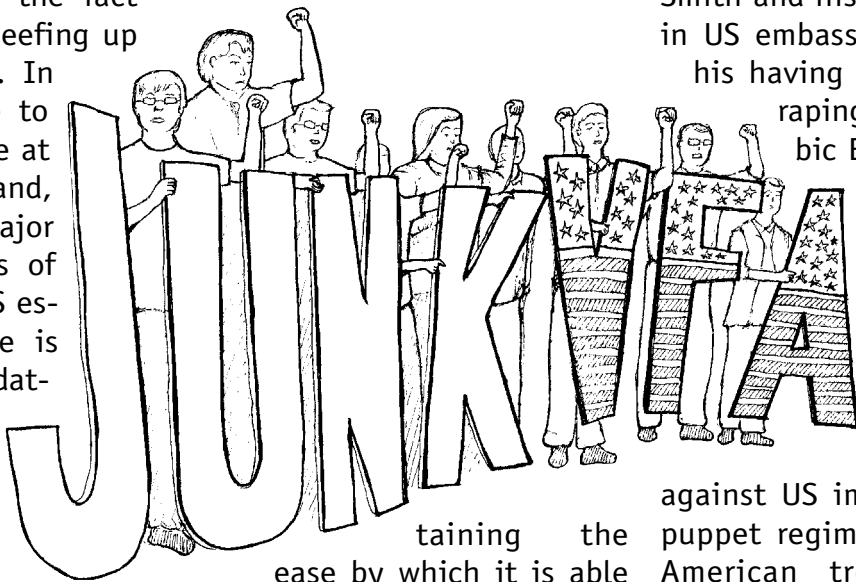
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ously concerned with the fact that China has been beefing up its military capability. In 2008, China was able to build a submarine base at the edge of Hainan Island, which is near the major commercial sea routes of Southeast Asia. The US estimates that the base is capable of accommodating up to 20 submarines, including a new type capable of launching nuclear ballistic missiles.

To counter China's growing military presence in the region, former US Pacific Fleet commander Adm. James Lyons has recommended closer ties with the US' allied regimes in the Asia-Pacific. He particularly recommended the establishment of "high-level military ties" with the Philippines and leasing to the country a squadron of F-16 jetfighters as well as warships as part of efforts to address the Chinese threat. Plans by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to purchase submarines in the name of modernization fall within this framework.

For the US, the Philippines remains valuable to its military strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Thus the importance of main-



taining the ease by which it is able to use the Philippines as an operational launching pad, source of supplies, training ground and repair station. As in the past, the US continues to use the Philippines as a docking station for its ships and troops—not only those operating in the Asia-Pacific but also those deployed in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Philippines remains a "favorite" spot for US military basing because it is ruled by obsequious puppet regimes. Through the VFA, American troops are able to freely enter and operate within the country beyond the purview of local laws. US domination over the Philippines was demonstrated with the forcible transfer of custody over Lance Corporal Daniel

Smith and his "detention" within US embassy grounds despite his having been convicted of raping a Filipina in Subic Bay in 2005.


The US likewise brazenly intervenes in the Philippines to suppress the progressive and revolutionary movement against US imperialism and its puppet regime. More than 700 American troops under the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTFP) of the US Pacific Fleet are permanently stationed in Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City. The JSOTFP is a US military agency that directs the course of the counterrevolutionary war in the Philippines. It conducts intelligence work, provides information to the AFP and actually participates in military operations within guerrilla fronts against the armed revolutionary forces.

The Philippines' neocolonial status is emphasized with every instance of US intervention and trampling of the country's sovereignty. The US is hellbent on maintaining the Philippines as a neocolony not only to be able to use it as a base in pursuit of its military strategy but to continue exploiting its natural resources and the cheap labor of Filipino workers.

As the US confronts the international capitalist crisis, it will surely guard more zealously its political, military and economic interests in the Philippines, to the detriment of the Filipino people.

The Filipino people must therefore fire up their patriotism. Their struggle for national liberation is intimately linked to their struggle for social justice and people's democracy.

AB

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# Take advantage of the worsening rifts within the Aquino camp

**A**fter barely a year in power, there already are gaping cracks in the US-Aquino regime's rule. The rifts among the various forces that supported Benigno Aquino III during the 2010 elections are threatening to weaken the already tenuous unity within the ruling clique.

During his candidacy in 2010, Aquino was able to unite a broad spectrum of forces ranging from reactionary politicians, big businessmen and reformist groups. But since his ascension to power, Aquino has been hard put trying to pay off everyone who supported and rode on his campaign by, among others, providing juicy positions in government and awarding lucrative contracts.

He has not been able to spread out such favors equally. Thus, even before Aquino could warm his seat of power, resentments and disappointments had already arisen among his allied forces.

The rivalries among these factions came to the fore this May as the one-year ban on appointing losing candidates to government positions lapsed and Aquino allies jockeyed for positions of power.

Sticking out like a sore thumb are Mar Roxas' maneuverings. Roxas was Aquino's losing vice presidential candidate, head of the Liberal Party and acknowledged leader of the "Balai" faction. Aquino has long been wanting to appoint Roxas to the powerful position he was promised so the latter could use it as a platform to campaign for the presidency in 2017. As early as April, Roxas had already been as-

signed a variety of high-profile roles.

Malacañang's legal team is still busy manufacturing a new position for Roxas where he could serve as Aquino's alter ego. Aquino's fevered efforts to catapult Roxas to such a position has caused resentment among the other factions, especially since it would mean sidelining other key Aquino officials.

Aside from Roxas, Aquino also plans on appointing other losing candidates to his cabinet. But to do this, Aquino must get rid of other members of his clique, which is a surefire way to fuel their anger.

The ruling regime now presents a stark picture of infighting among Aquino relatives, classmates and friends who are all scrambling to have a taste of the spoils of power.

Unfortunately, the ruling regime has to contend with the fact that its resources are too dissipated for its rival factions to share smoothly and peacefully. Aquino cannot but favor one faction or relative over another.

Sooner or later, those who have been sidelined by



Aquino will feel compelled to expose what they know of the anomalies, the corruption and abuses of officials within the ruling clique.

The unravelling of the Aquino clique due to intense rivalries for the spoils of power is weakening its rule. The Filipino people are severely dismayed to see the favors and privileges enjoyed by the Kamag-anak, Kaklase and Kaibigan Inc. while the toiling masses are barely able to cope with the burdens of crisis.

Unemployment continues to grow. Prices of goods and services are skyrocketing. The worker and peasant masses and even the middle forces are very much hard up. All Aquino has had to offer are band-aid solutions like the "pantawid pasada" and the conditional cash transfer. Despite mouthing the slogan of "peace," repression, brutality and other violations of human rights continue without letup especially in the countryside against those who have been opposing and taking action against the antipeople policies of the ruling regime.

It has become exceedingly clear to the people that Aquino has failed to make good on his promise of ridding the government of corruption. It has also become apparent that the Aquino regime neither has the capability nor the will to advance policies that will liberate the people from the bonds of poverty, hunger and fascist violence. In the face of the worsening economic crisis besetting the people, a broad people's movement aimed at Aquino's ouster has been slowly emerging and expanding.

Sooner or later, growing demands and people's struggles to oust Arroyo will deepen the factional rival-

ries within the ruling regime and among rival factions within the ruling classes. On the other hand, this intensifying rivalry will also help and strengthen the broad mass movement against the Aquino regime.

We must seize this opportunity by actively linking with forces both within and outside the ruling regime whose interests have been tram-

pled on by Aquino's favored camps. They must be encouraged to cooperate openly or clandestinely with the broad alliance along with the basic sectors advancing mass struggles. Sooner or later, the further expansion of this anti-Aquino alliance will isolate the Aquino camp even more and help hasten the end of its puppet and fascist rule. **AB**

## Aquino regime hellbent on pushing liberalization in mining

**T**he Aquino regime is hellbent on "reforming" the mining industry in order to put money into its rapidly emptying coffers. According to Secretary Ramon Paje of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the higher taxes to be paid by mining companies will put ₱8 billion into the government treasury in addition to the ₱7 billion to be earned from royalty taxes.

In this regard, Paje has been pushing for the declaration of 21 "mineral reservations" in Ilocos Norte, Zambales, Bulacan, Camarines Sur, Samar island, Surigao del Norte, Compostela Valley and Zamboanga del Norte and all offshore areas in the country.

Paje's "reforms" all fall within the framework of the regime's policy of liberalizing the mining industry. The Aquino regime has thus targeted a higher mining output. From 20% in 2009 under the Arroyo regime, the first months of the Aquino regime already saw a 10% increase in mining output. This betrays the regime's hypocrisy in declaring that it would protect the environment.

Aquino turns a blind eye to the widespread environmental degradation wrought by mining operations and to the disasters and loss of lives they have engendered. Like its predecessor, the Aquino regime disregards the widespread destruction of people's lives and property as well as the environment due to incessant profit-taking by foreign capitalists and their co-

ports among government officials.

### Opposition to mining in Negros

Negrenses are wary of the expansion of mining operations in the island. Exploration and other mining operations are currently being conducted in Negros by Philex Mining, Philmet Exploration Corp. and Essensa Mining Corp. Forty other companies have also filed applications with the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), covering the towns of Binalbagan, Cauayan, Hinobaan and Isabela and the cities of Himamaylan, Kabankalan and Sibalay in Negros Occiden-

tal as well as the towns of Basay, Ayungon, Bindoy, Tayasan, Jimalalud, La Libertad and Guihulngan in Negros Oriental. Forty percent (40%) of the island's land area or 80% of Negros' agricultural land will be affected.

Still fresh in the Negrenses' memory are the disasters and hardships suffered by thousands of farmers due to mining operations in the 1950s in Sibalay City and Hinobaan in Negros Occidental and in Basay, Negros Oriental. The operations polluted rivers, streams and other sources of water and destroyed farmlands after toxic chemicals from the mines overflowed. Many people fell ill from the poisoned water and dust-filled air.

The people's armed and unarmed resistance to mining have been growing, said National Democratic Front (NDF)-Negros spokesperson Ka Frank Fernandez. The people and the revolutionary forces have been exerting all efforts to stop the desertification of the island due to destructive mining.

Almost immediately after the NDF-Negros' strongly-worded statement, Negros Occidental Gov. Alfredo Marañon and all of the mayors in the province signed a resolution on May 12 addressed to Benigno Aquino III stating their fierce opposition to the widespread offshore mining of magnetite that has been tak-



ing place even within 14 marine protected areas in the province. The affected areas have a combined area of 36,533 square kilometers.

The province's local officials also called on Aquino to order the DENR-MGB to stop accepting and processing applications for offshore exploration and mining, and revoke all previously approved applications.

The people in the neighboring island of Panay also have the same worries as the Negrenses. They fear the desertification of many areas due to the relentless expansion of both inland and offshore mining.

The Panay-based Madias Ecological Movement has reported that aside from large mining companies such as Teresa Marble Corp., Quarry Ventures, Walter Mining and Industrial Corp. and Semirara Coal Mines that have been expanding their operations, there are 91 other applications pending with the DENR-MGB covering 311,776 hectares.

Seventy of these applications are for large-scale mining such as that of Evergifted Mining Corporation that plans to mine magnetite sand in more than 14,542 hectares along the shorelines of Roxas City, Pan-ay, Lutod-lutod and Pilar in Capiz.

The Madias Ecological Movement and Defend Patrimony have been closely monitoring the situ-

ation in their efforts to protect the environment and the country's economic sovereignty.

Residents and local officials of Panay fear the destruction of marine life, beaches and fishing grounds caused by offshore mining. The latter entails the extraction of millions of tons of sand from the ocean floor, from which magnetite is derived. Experts says this destroys sand quality and changes the temperature of sea water which is detrimental to marine flora and fauna.

In the Cordillera region, residents of three villages in Tuba, Benguet have maintained their vigilance since March against the entry of Philex Mining and two other giant mining companies. They have demanded the expulsion of three Philippine Army camps which have been serving as armed guards of these mining companies.

In Bicol, particularly in the island of Catanduanes, many residents have joined since April an antimining coalition that enjoys strong support from the Diocese of Virac Social Action Foundation Inc. of the Catholic church. The Katandungan Kontra sa Mina (KKM) aims to block the operations of Asianmines, Inc. and Xing Fu-Fang Mining Corp. that have pending applications to conduct mining operations in the towns of Viga, Gigmoto and Bato, covering up to 4,443 hectares. **AB**

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## NPA punishes foreign mining company in SMR

**R**ed fighters of the 3rd Pulang Bagani Company of the Merardo Arce Command in Southern Mindanao Region meted punishment on a security unit of RACEL Mines and Minerals on May 12.

The NPA set up a checkpoint in Barangay Kingking, Pantukan, Compostela Valley and blocked a four-man security force travelling with a geologist employed by the mining firm.

A member of the security force decided to fight it out with the Red fighters and was killed in the process, said Ka Rigoberto Sanchez, spokesperson of the Merardo Arce Command. The three other security men and the geologist were unharmed.

The Red fighters seized four M4 US carbines, also known as

M4A1. The M4A1 is a modern automatic rifle that is now the standard issue of the US Special Forces and S.W.A.T. units. Also confiscated were four communications radios.

Sanchez said this tactical offensive implemented the people's policy of defending the national patrimony from US imperialist plunder and destruction which the current US-Aquino regime has intensified. The revolutionary people's government stands for a pro-Filipino and environmentally friendly policy. The NPA strictly implements

this policy to prevent foreign monopoly capitalists conniving with local government officials from plundering the country's natural resources with impunity.

Sanchez also said that the Aquino government is currently implementing the liberalization of mining in the provinces of Compostela Valley, Davao Oriental, South Cotabato, Surigao and Paquibato District in Davao City. The policy will affect the livelihoods of farmers and entire communities of national minorities.

RACEL Mines and Minerals and its American partner St. Augustine mine gold in the mountains of Pantukan. They maintain a fairly large armed group that guards the area and the Americans running the 4,000-hectare mining concession. This is aside from the protection being provided by the 71st IB. **AB**

# Landgrabbing and maneuvering in Palawan

**P**rogressive organizations and institutions as well as church groups conducted a fact-finding and solidarity mission on April 5-7 regarding the threatened eviction of residents from Taytay, Palawan. Taytay is one of the foremost tourist destinations in Palawan.

The activity was led by the Katipunan ng Samahang Magbubukid sa Timog Katagalugan (KASAMA-TK) and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). Representatives from the National Council of Churches of the Philippines and the Asian Peasant Coalition as well as Rep. Rafael Mariano of Partidong Anakpawis also joined the activity, as did delegates from various sectors in Palawan and Metro Manila. They also launched a medical mission and relief operations that benefited some 300 families.

According to the fact-finding results, residents of Taytay are facing eviction due to a program being pushed by the local government and the Pujalte Estate in connivance with Guevent Industrial Development Cor-

poration (GIDC), a well-known real estate developer.

Up to 4,000 families are set to be driven away from their homes with the conversion of more than 1,265 hectares of land to commercial and ecotourism uses. Even those living outside of the directly affected areas stand to lose their livelihoods as most residents of Taytay farm for a living.

It was the Pujalte Estate owned by Joyce Pujalte Dwyer that first seized lands in Taytay. As early as 1935, the Pujalte Lumber Company (PLC) was put up as a logging firm. It eventually denuded the town's forests. When it stopped operating in 1985 and complied with a government order ceding the land to the farmers, PLC administrator Atty. Daniel Romana gradu-

ally undertook a series of underhanded moves to recover the land from the peasants. He filed several petitions to revoke the farmers' ownership of the land and even pretended to do this in pursuit of the farmers' interests. The farmers' ownership of the land was revoked in 1997 by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in connivance with the local government, thereby restoring control to PLC. In 2002, the Pujalte Estate sold the property to GIDC, which began fencing it off. It has begun building areas for tourism and eventually plans on building other areas for commercial use.

Obviously, neither the local government nor DAR has any plans of implementing genuine agrarian reform. They have instead been conspiring with landlords and giant corporations to systematically seize the farmers' lands. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) is inutile in protecting the farmers' interests. Instead, CARPER has even intensified feudal exploitation in the countryside and poverty among the

## Anomalies in the AFP

UP to P14.1 billion in cash advances in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in 2010 remain unliquidated. This was reported to the Senate by no less than the special investigative committee of the Department of National Defense.

The committee report cited clear violations of the law by the AFP. For instance, records of transactions have gone missing. In some instances, national security is invoked as a pretext to avoid scrutiny. The use of alternative methods of purchasing military equipment was also abused.

## Cops summarily execute Anakbayan activist

ELEMENTS of the Navotas PNP summarily executed a member of the youth group Anakbayan on April 21.

Twenty-seven year old Jerwin de Antonio was picked up by policemen from his house in Bagong Silang, San Jose Village, Navotas City on April after he came home from selling fish in the market.

Witnesses said he was forced into a patrol car where policemen began beating him up even as he held up his hands and cried for help. At the precinct, policemen continued mauling him. Early the next morning, witnesses also reported seeing three policemen bring the victim to a sidestreet near the barangay outpost in Navotas West where he was again beaten up. The witnesses also reported seeing the policemen force a gun into De Antonio's hand, ostensibly to give him a chance to fight back.

De Antonio's relatives found his body in a funeral home in Navotas on April 22. The PNP claimed in its official report that a PO1 Ronie de la Cruz was forced to shoot him after De Antonio seized a gun.

peasantry.

The residents, however, have refused to be cowed and have learned to fight and assert their right to the land. In 2007, they tore down the fences put up by GIDC and launched protest actions in the town center. Despite the cases filed against the leaders and attempts to divide their ranks, the residents have stood their ground and raised the level of their struggle and unity. They cooperated with progressive groups to put up mass organizations in villages affected by the land conversion project in order to consolidate their ranks. They set up organizations like the Pinagkaisang Lakas ng mga Okupante, Residente,

Manggagawa at Magsasaka sa Taytay (PLORMM) and the Samahan ng mga Mamamayang Beneficiaries sa Taytay that are now at the forefront of their struggle.

The town of Taytay is one of Palawan's much-vaunted tourist areas. It has a land area of 1,390 hectares and comprises 31 barangays. It is rich in natural resources and includes part of the Palawan Marine Sanctuary.

The town is currently being targeted for cityhood. Private companies plan on putting up businesses and urbanize it not for the welfare of its residents but for the interests of foreign and local ruling classes. AB

## Weaving lies under Oplan Bayanihan

**A** major part of the AFP's Oplan Bayanihan counterrevolutionary campaign involves the conduct of disinformation and psywar. AFP spokespersons have thus been lying through their teeth to make the military and police appear "pro-peace" and cover up their fascist crimes and their failures in the battlefield. Nonetheless, the military and its fascist spokespersons are eventually caught in the tangled web of their own lies. The following are some of the most striking examples.

**The lie:** According to the AFP, noted scientist Leonardo Co and two of his companions were killed in the crossfire between forces of the 19th IB and an NPA unit on November 15, 2010 in the forests of Kananga, Leyte.

**The truth:** No encounter took place between the NPA and the AFP on November 15, 2010 in Kananga, Leyte. In fact, no NPA unit was in the area on that day. Co and his companions Sofronio Cortez and Julius Borromeo were collecting plant samples from the forest when they were fired upon by elements of the 19th IB who mistook them for members of the NPA.

**The lie:** Four alleged NPA members who had held up a bus were killed by soldiers who blocked the bus at a checkpoint in Catanauan, Quezon on December 1, 2010.

**The truth:** The people killed by soldiers of the 74th IB were not NPA members but ordinary civilians. They were killed when the soldiers blocked

the bus that had been held up and peppered it with bullets while passengers were still aboard. Among those killed was the bus conductor and a teacher.

**The lie:** Spokespersons of the 10th ID-PA claimed that the soldiers ambushed by the NPA in Barangay Kingking, Pantukan, Compostela Valley on May 4 were conducting a search and rescue operation.

**The truth:** The 71st IB troops were conducting combat operations against the NPA when they were ambushed by Red fighters. In fact, three columns of

soldiers were sent for this operation. The AFP claimed that the soldiers were conducting search and rescue operations to court the public's sympathy.

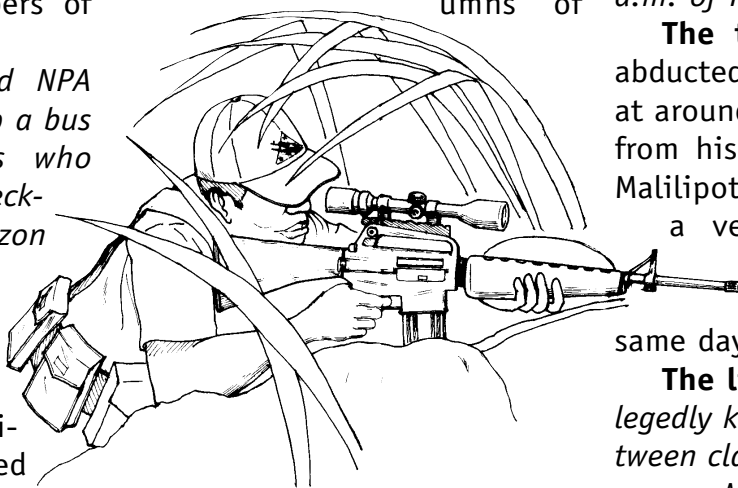
**The lie:** According to the 303rd IBde, a number of NPA Red fighters were killed in a mis-encounter between two NPA units in Calatrava, Negros Occidental on January 28.

**The truth:** It was the AFP that figured in a mis-encounter. Fifteen soldiers under the 303rd Bde were killed after their units traded shots. Five soldiers had earlier been killed in an NPA ambush. A Red fighter was killed before the NPA unit could withdraw.

**The lie:** The 9th ID claimed that a certain Rodel/Elmer Estrellado was a high-ranking NPA leader killed in an encounter between the AFP and the NPA in Bato, Camarines Sur at around 6 a.m. of February 25.

**The truth:** Estrellado was abducted by armed state agents at around 9 a.m. of February 25 from his house in Barangay 3, Malilipot, Albay and forced into a vehicle. His body was found in Buluang, Bato, Camarines Sur that same day.

**The lie:** A young girl was allegedly killed in the crossfire between clashing AFP and NPA forces on March 10, 2011 in Sitio



*Balinsasayaw, Barangay Sta. Fe, Mandaan, Masbate.*

**The truth:** The young girl was killed after soldiers of the 9th ID sprayed bullets at the house of the Amaro family.

**The lie:** *In a statement, the 56th IB claimed that six Red fighters and a soldier were killed in an encounter between the AFP and the NPA in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan on April 26.*

**The truth:** Soldiers attacked a team of Red fighters and opened fire even if they were near a group of houses. The NPA unit immediately distanced themselves from the area to avoid civilian casualties, while firing selectively at the soldiers. A Corporal Reyes was killed and three other soldiers were wounded before the comrades were able to withdraw. In contrast to the restraint exercised by the NPA, the soldiers sprayed automatic fire at the houses, wounding resident Lanie Mendoza and her two children. The soldiers then illegally arrested and detained former barangay councilor Carlito Mendoza and all his relatives who lived near the scene of the fighting.

**The lie:** *PNP spokesperson Chief Supt. Agrimero Cruz claimed in a press release that eight NPA members were killed by the police in Rizal, Nueva Ecija on May 13.*

**The truth:** There was no encounter between the police and the NPA. The eight men killed were believed to be members of the Red Vigilant

Group, a criminal syndicate handled by high-ranking PNP and military officers. It is composed of criminals who are routinely let in and out of jail and are involved in a string of gun-for-hire, robbery, extortion and other cases.

**The lie:** *On March 5, the PNP accused the NPA of burning two buses of Silver Star Bus Liner in Almeria, Biliran and killing the two drivers.*

**The truth:** The NPA had nothing to do with the bus-burning incident in Biliran. The PNP has not presented an iota of evidence to support its accusations against the NPA. The PNP was merely spreading disinformation to cover up its failures in the successful NPA ambush on February 26 in Arteche, Eastern Samar.

**The lie:** *Police officials claimed that they had arrested in Panabo City in the second week of April two petty criminals who allegedly joined the NPA.*

**The truth:** Toto Ancahas and Gerald Robles are not NPA members but civilians arrested and tortured by the Panabo police. Robles was on temporary liberty from his incarceration at the Davao Penal Colony. The police got angry at him for refusing to join a drug and extortion syndicate being formed by the police. Ancahas, on the other hand was included in the PNP's list of wanted criminals after he posted bail in behalf of the families of four NPA members who were arrested in 2009. **AB**

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## Colleges and universities to hike tuition fees

MORE than 15% or 282 out of a total of 1,792 universities and colleges in the country will raise tuition fees upon the opening of classes this June, giving another headache to students and their parents. School supplies also registered a 5% markup a few weeks before classes.

On May 13, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) announced that 69 private colleges and universities in the National Capital Region (NCR) will be raising tuition fees in June. The hikes will range from 3.5% to 12%.

The biggest tuition fee hike will be imposed by the St. Luke's College of Medicine (12%). The University of the East-College of Medicine, Ateneo de Manila University, Ateneo Graduate School of Busi-

ness, Miriam College, Assumption College and OB Montessori will be raising their tuition fees by 5%. Also hiking their fees are the University of the East-Manila, 4.35%; University of Santo Tomas, 3.75%; and De La Salle University, 3.5%.

There will also be hikes in other areas of the country such as in Baguio Central University, 12%; St. Louis University, 5% in both tuition and miscellaneous fees; Ateneo de Cagayan, 5%; and Ateneo de Davao, 6.99%. A number of State Universities and Colleges (SUC) are likewise set to raise tuition and other fees, like Pangasinan State University, 30% (P170 per unit, up from P130 per unit); Technological University of the Philippines, 9.6%; University of Mindanao, 8.5%; and the University of the Philippines-Mind-

anao which raised its Physical Education fees by P250. In Western Visayas, 24 schools will be hiking tuition fees by an average of 14.92%, three of them state colleges.

With these annual hikes, tuition fees are estimated to have doubled since 2001. Meanwhile, the CHED itself has admitted that eight out of ten high school graduates will not be able to go to college due to the rising costs of education.

The Kabataan Party has thus pushed anew for the passage of House Bill 3708 which sets a three-year moratorium on tuition fee hikes in all schools. It also called for the revocation of CHED Memorandum No. 13 and the Education Act of 1982 which both paved the way for relentless hikes in school fees.



## Transport strike paralyzes Negros Occidental

A two-day transport strike paralyzed 90% of public transportation in Negros Occidental.

The May 17-18 protest action led by the United Negros Drivers and Operators Center (UNDOC) was launched to dramatize opposition to the extraordinary discrepancy between the prices of petroleum products in Negros Occidental and other areas. The price per liter of diesel, gasoline, kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is higher by ₱4 to ₱5 in Negros compared to Metro Manila.

The protest action was supported by progressive organizations. Students set up "rally centers" in strategic areas. Two business groups likewise gave their all-out support—the Bacolod Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BFCCCI) and the Metro Bacolod Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MBCCI).

The transport strike was launched in preparation for a bigger coordinated mass action in the next several days.

## CPP extends condolences in death of Chit Estella

THE Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) extended its condolences on the death of Lourdes Estella-Simbulan, who was better known in media circles as Chit Estella. Estella died in a vehicular accident in Quezon City on the night of May 13.

Tributes poured in upon Estella's death. In a short message, the CPP said Estella served as a stalwart of patriotic and critical journalism.

Estella was among the founders of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and VERA Files. Before she died, she had also been a professor for years at the UP College of Journalism.

Her firm stand against the anomalies of the Estrada regime marked a high point in her career as a journalist. She edited the *Pinoy Times* which focused on publishing articles critical of Estrada. Before this, she resigned as managing editor of *The Manila Times* when the newspaper's owner published a public apology to Estrada after the latter threatened to close down the publication and slap it with a string of lawsuits.

Estella began as a student activist at the University of the Philippines in Diliman in the 1970s. She was president of the UP Journalism Club and the Youth for Social Action Council which were both active against the Marcos dictatorship. After graduating, she wrote for the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) newsletter.

## 11 cops killed in India

UP to 11 policemen were killed and 15 were wounded in an ambush by guerrillas under the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-M).

The ambush occurred at Lohardaga District in Jharkhand state on May 3. The police and paramilitary forces were poised to strike after learning of plans by guerrillas to build a camp in the forested areas of Dhardhariya. Instead, the attacking forces who arrived earlier fell into a trap when the guerrillas detonated a bomb along their path before opening fire. Six elements of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed on the spot in the first volley of fire.

## Ex-Ombudsman Gutierrez faces new raps

FORMER Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez was able to avoid an impeachment trial at the Senate when she resigned. But she has not been able to steer clear of corruption and other charges filed by the Anakpawis Party, the National Union of People's Lawyers, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas and other peasant organizations. Leaders

of these groups trooped to the Department of Justice on May 9 to charge Gutierrez with violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, obstruction of justice and perjury stemming from the ₱728 million Fertilizer Fund scam.

It will be remembered that Task Force Abono was formed in 2004 to investigate anomalies

pertaining to the Fertilizer Fund. Gloria Arroyo had diverted the fund meant for the purchase of fertilizer for farmers and used it for her presidential campaign. Task Force Abono thus recommended filing charges against then Undersecretary of Agriculture Jocelyn "Joc-joc" Bolante and others involved in the scam.