



EDITORIAL

Hardships and perils due to government incompetence

The Filipino people are undergoing grave hardships and face perils as a result of the Duterte regime's failed response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Millions of Filipinos are facing not only the continued threats of Covid-19, but also the burden of economic measures that worsen the crisis brought about by decades of neoliberal policies.

Over the past days, Malacañang has allowed the opening of offices and factories, after a more-than-60-day lockdown. Duterte is rushing to reboot the economy which he shut down in March in the face of the rapid depletion of government resources, worsening problem of hunger and rising people's anger. Because of the failed measures of the Duterte government, the Philippines is still far from controlling the Covid-19 pandemic. Many fear that the country's health system will be unable to cope once the virus spreads again and the number of infected and hospitalized shoots up.

After two months without wages or income, workers are very keen on returning to work. The toiling masses were plunged into poverty and hunger under the lockdown. This is a result of sorely limited funds and the slow and the chaotic system of aid distribution. Despite their eagerness, they also fear that once they gather in factories or shops, the virus will again quickly spread.

Duterte is veritably exposing workers to danger when it did not obligate capitalists to provide them testing services and required that only those with symptoms should be

examined. According to data, more than 80% of those infected are asymptomatic or experience only mild symptoms. The regime and the capitalists are taking advantage of workers' desperation to work and earn wages. Workers are made to report to work if they have to walk several kilometers under the heat of the sun or get stuck in hours of traffic because of left and right checkpoints of abusive police and soldiers.

Recently, the Duterte regime admitted it has no plans of carrying out mass testing. Even amid the pandemic, it insists on its policy of not providing enough funds for health and giving control to the capitalists.

Thousands of nurses and doctors were infected by Covid-19 in hospitals due to the failure to pre-

pare enough protective equipment. It was already in the middle of the pandemic when funds were allotted for purchasing these.

Despite claiming to push the program to "test, trace and treat," the Duterte government has not allotted enough funds and is relying on big capitalists to buy necessary equipment and run laboratory operations. Even in the face of the pandemic, capitalists still compute their profits.

Testing is being done only on people who are already sick, people they have gotten in contact with, and arriving Filipino migrant workers. However, in times of pandemic, mass testing including those without symptoms or not suspected to have been infected is needed as the key strategy to determine where the virus is spreading in order to isolate the infected, treat the sick and protect those who are not yet ill.

Because there is no mass testing and testing capacity is low, the regime remains blind to the real extent of Covid-19 infections in the country. Its data is incomplete and

does not show the actual extent of the pandemic. It does not actually know how many are asymptomatic and were not brought to hospitals.

It is fine that some local officials have taken measures to have their residents tested. However, without national coordination in such testing efforts, knowledge of the pandemic will be limited to one barrio or town, and efforts will only be wasted.

Because he really has no idea, Duterte is resorting to disinformation, giving false assurances, scaremongering and threatening people. In the end, it blames the people for the continuing spread of the virus to justify the imposition of more restrictions on the pretext of fighting the pandemic.

The Duterte regime is slow and dimwitted in facing the Covid-19 pandemic. It has chosen not to fund mass testing, contact tracing and isolation. It is prioritizing its loan-driven infrastructure projects, the purchase of helicopters, cannons and bombs, and pocketing shares in these contracts. It has not provided





enough capital to fund local scientists and researchers to manufacture enough equipment for testing the virus and other needs to fight the pandemic.

It is more occupied with its scheme to establish a fascist dictatorship. It has the military and police in command of the government's pandemic response. It is busy suppressing complaints rather than addressing them. A number of people who have expressed disgust ("kill Duterte") have been arrested, and ABS-CBN has been shut down. The police are getting away with their abusive punishment of people for "misdemeanors." It uses terror to silence everyone. Now, even the funds under the "social amelioration program" (SAP) will be given to the dirty hands of the AFP, to make sure, there will be no more complaints.

To the Filipino people, we must not merely bear the burden of Duterte's failed response and abuse of power. Duterte and his officials must be held accountable for causing gross hardships and suppression of the people's rights during the lockdown. They must be made responsible for their failure to carry out necessary health measures for the country to defeat the pandemic. We must not remain silent. On the contrary, we must express with all our might and manifest in various ways our anger and protest against Duterte's failed and oppressive measures.

Continue to demand the national government to mount a mass testing program as key response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Continue to push for strengthening the health system, especially the public hospitals and laboratories across the country, hiring more nurses and health workers and raising their wages. Fight for necessary subsidies for food, medicine and medical attention to take care of the health of the elderly who are vulnerable to Covid-19.

Hold the Duterte regime ac-

 <p>Vol. LI No. 10 May 21, 2020</p> <hr/> <p>Ang <i>Ang Bayan</i> is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray and English. Ang Bayan welcomes contributions in the form of articles and news items. Readers are encouraged to send feedback and recommendations for improving our newspaper.</p> <p> instagram.com/prwcnewsroom</p> <p> @prwc_info</p> <p> cppinformationbureau@gmail.com</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;"><u>Contents</u></h2> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Editorial: Hardships and perils due to incompetent government</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NPA-Bukidnon attacks abusive soldiers</td> <td style="text-align: right;">3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NPA harassment vs. 20th IB</td> <td style="text-align: right;">3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No mass testing</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Balik probinsya, landgrabbing Party, travel amid lockdown</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regime railroads neoliberal measures</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>What will happen to Filipino businesses?</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Solidarity amid distress in Samar</td> <td style="text-align: right;">7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education conference in Negros</td> <td style="text-align: right;">7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Duterte purchases P2.4-B artilleries</td> <td style="text-align: right;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bayan Muna seeks Meralco probe</td> <td style="text-align: right;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sorsogon massacre</td> <td style="text-align: right;">9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Militarization in Surigao del Sur</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mass protests amid lockdown</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NDFP supports UN's appeal</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> </tr> </table>	Editorial: Hardships and perils due to incompetent government	1	NPA-Bukidnon attacks abusive soldiers	3	NPA harassment vs. 20th IB	3	No mass testing	4	Balik probinsya, landgrabbing Party, travel amid lockdown	4	Regime railroads neoliberal measures	6	What will happen to Filipino businesses?	6	Solidarity amid distress in Samar	7	Education conference in Negros	7	Duterte purchases P2.4-B artilleries	8	Bayan Muna seeks Meralco probe	8	Sorsogon massacre	9	Militarization in Surigao del Sur	10	Mass protests amid lockdown	10	NDFP supports UN's appeal	10
Editorial: Hardships and perils due to incompetent government	1																														
NPA-Bukidnon attacks abusive soldiers	3																														
NPA harassment vs. 20th IB	3																														
No mass testing	4																														
Balik probinsya, landgrabbing Party, travel amid lockdown	4																														
Regime railroads neoliberal measures	6																														
What will happen to Filipino businesses?	6																														
Solidarity amid distress in Samar	7																														
Education conference in Negros	7																														
Duterte purchases P2.4-B artilleries	8																														
Bayan Muna seeks Meralco probe	8																														
Sorsogon massacre	9																														
Militarization in Surigao del Sur	10																														
Mass protests amid lockdown	10																														
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countable for the gross lack and slow distribution of aid under the now two-month lockdown. Expose and denounce how Duterte's bourgeois comprador partners are exploiting the pandemic to earn profits and evade taxes in the name of helping and giving donations.

Workers must demand health measures in factories and offices. They must push for wage increases, a national minimum and hazard pay for work during the pandemic. They must fight as well for regular jobs and for their right to unionize and collective bargaining. In the face of the crisis brought about by the prolonged lockdown, the small capitalists can unite with workers to push the government for emergency funds

to enable them to pay wage hikes.

Genuine land reform must be pushed as the only way to bring life to the rural economy. Denounce widespread land-use conversion for infrastructure and tourism projects, plantations and mining, and the push for growing commercial timber and fruits. Demand free land distribution and subsidies for food production and building local industries for processing of local agricultural products.

Fight measures that worsen oppression including additional taxes to pay the government's almost \$4 billion additional loans. Expose and condemn the "infrastructure" plan that will further pull the country deeper into debt and crisis, espe-

cially those which trample on people's rights and damage the environment.

The Covid-19 crisis has brought to the surface the extreme rottenness of the semicolonial and semifeudal system. It has exposed the country's dependence on imported material and equipment. It has exposed the crisis-ridden and unproductive economy.

Because of the hardship and oppression under the Duterte government's failed response, it is but just for the Filipino people to demand Duterte's resignation or the ouster of his incompetent government. This is the most effective way for the Filipino people to fight and defeat the Covid-19 pandemic. **AB**

NPA-Bukidnon attacks abusive soldiers

THE NEW PEOPLE'S Army (NPA)-Bukidnon mounted successive military offensives against abusive soldiers in the province from May 5-14. Four fascist soldiers were killed while two others were wounded.

On May 11, Red fighters sniped at elements of the 60th IB at 56th IB at Sitio Tapayanon, Barangay Mandahikan, Cabanglasan. Their presence in the barrio has long been causing grave hardships and abuses against the masses. Two soldiers were killed in the offensive.

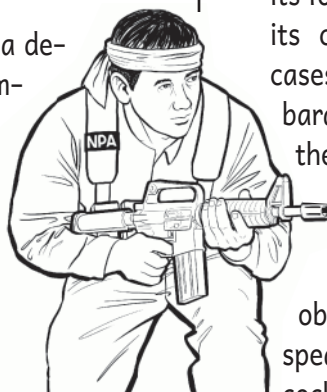
A day earlier, another NPA unit sniped a detachment of the 8th IB at Sitio Miaray, Barangay Mandahikan. Two soldiers were killed and two others were wounded.

Meanwhile, Red fighters also ambushed two intelligence agents of the 8th IB in separate incidents. On May 10, Red fighters ambushed a CAFGU element in Barangay Busdi, Malaybalay City. The said element served as guide of the 8th IB in its combat operations.

On May 13, another intelligence agent was killed in Barangay Indalasa, Cabanglasan. The said agent was behind the forced "surrender" of Lumad Talaandigs and the killing of two members of peasant group Ogyon in Cabanglasan.

A unit of the NPA-Bukidnon also harassed a detachment of the CAA in Barangay Bolunay, Impasug-ong on May 14. The same detachment was also harassed by the NPA on May 5.

Units of the NPA in the Panay island also harassed a military detachment in Barangay Anhawan, Janiuay, Iloilo on May 12 and another CAFGU detachment in Barangay Barasan, Igaras in the same province on May 3.



AB

NPA-Northern Samar harasses notorious 20th IB

THE NEW PEOPLE'S Army (NPA)-Northern Samar mounted three successive harassment operations against 20th IB soldiers who have long been wreaking havoc in Barangay San Miguel, Las Navas.

A soldier was killed in a sniping operation mounted by Red fighters against a temporary military encampment in the area on May 9. In retaliation, the soldiers strafed two peasant houses at Zone 7 in the said barangay. Residents were forced to flee because of this. Red fighters fired at the soldiers again that evening.

A day earlier, Red fighters and the people's militia harassed a military encampment which they constructed just a few meters away from a school. Two soldiers were seriously wounded.

The 20th IB has been conducting Retooled Community Support Program (RCSP) operations in San Miguel and adjacent barrios Perez, Quirino and San Francisco. The unit has not withdrawn its forces even when the Duterte regime declared its ceasefire. Soldiers continue to perpetrate cases of harassment and force civilians and even barangay officials to surrender as members of the NPA. They travel in-and-out of the barrios and approach residents without taking precautions to prevent the spread of Covid-19 such as wearing face masks or observing physical distancing. They also spearhead gatherings such as the conduct of cockfights. **AB**

Without mass testing, we cannot defeat Covid-19

From the outset, the World Health Organization (WHO) pushed for mass testing as the key to defeating Covid-19. Its officials said, "we cannot fight fire with blindfolds on." Mass testing must be used expeditiously to determine where the virus is spreading in order to break its transmission. Until there is no vaccine, this is the strategy which the WHO favors more than "physical distancing," of separating people from each other which results in more economic and health problems.

Thus, Malacañang's admission that it has no mass testing program caused widespread people's outrage. Malacañang even twitted mass testing as a "wrong term" because it claims it is impossible to test everyone. For two months, Duterte destroyed the economy and drove people into the hunger and poverty without exerting any effort to strengthen the government's capacity for mass testing.

Its April 30 target of 8,000 daily tests was achieved only in mid-May. It claims this will be ramped up to 30,000 before the end of May, but according to the DOH's May 17 data, it has not yet reached 10,000 daily. There are only 30 laboratories. These are choking because of the large number of tests. Because of its slow pace, more than 25,000 Filipino migrants were stuck in Manila Bay

for almost a month waiting for their test results.

All in all, only 170,027 individual have been tested, or 0.15% of the Philippine population (or 1,546 per million. This is far from the recommendation of testing 2% of the population. This is small compared to the 2,681 tests per million in Vietnam, and 14,691 tests per million in South Korea.

At least 2.2 million individuals would have to be tested in the country within a short period of time. Even with the end-May target capacity, it will still take 70 more days to complete this. At this pace, the country will fail to keep in step with the spread of the virus. AB

Landgrabbing at the core of "Balik Probinsya"

Landgrabbing in the cities and countryside is at the core of the Duterte regime's Balik Probinsya (Back to the Provinces) program. Rodrigo Duterte and his lackey Christopher Go is peddling the program as a solution to the congestion in Metro Manila during the Covid-19 pandemic. But this program is neither new nor original.

Every government from Marcos to Benigno Aquino had its own version of the "back to the province" program. For decades, the reactionary state has been attempting to evict poor communities from Metro Manila to free up prime real estate for bourgeois compradors and their foreign counterparts.

Under Duterte's Balik Probinsya, the poor will be given land in the provinces that is already occupied by settlers and minorities. These include the 15-hectare public land to be granted to each returning family that is to be planted with trees under the National Greening Program. The said program covers farms and ancestral lands targeted for expansion of commercial tree plantations.

Instead of Balik Probinsya, the urban poor demands the prompt construction of affordable and decent housing as a solution to congestion in Metro Manila and other city centers. It should address their clamor for jobs, wage and income increase and social services, instead of throwing them to the countryside where poverty rates are even higher and there are no jobs. To address the migration of people to the cities, the rural economy must be developed by free distribution of land and setting up agriculture-related industries in the provinces. AB

Government officials continue to party and travel amid lockdown

THE NATIONAL CAPITAL Region Police office was widely criticized for hosting a birthday bash for its chief, Debold Sinas, on May 8. Even Rodrigo Duterte himself drew flak after traveling home to Davao City on May 16 despite strict restrictions on air travel and going outside areas under "enhanced community quarantine."

Duterte and his police's violation of their own lockdown rules is a gross insult to millions of people who are already suffering from hunger and prohibited from going out. These violations were committed while millions of people are locked up in their homes under the guise of combatting Covid-19. Police brutalities against ordinary people who violate quarantine protocols continue unabated. The most recent incident saw worker Ronald Campo mauled by two police elements in General Trias, Cavite on May 12. Campo had to be rushed to the hospital after sustaining severe injuries. AB

Regime railroads neoliberal measures as pandemic response

The Duterte regime is exploiting the Covid-19 pandemic to railroad the enactment of neoliberal reforms that it has long been pushing for. It repackaged the said measures under the PH-Progreso (Philippine Program for Recovery with Equity and Solidarity), a proposed program which purportedly aims to boost the economy which has been gravely devastated by the lockdown. The program primarily covers the old scheme to cut the corporate income tax and the implementation of infrastructure projects under the Build, Build, Build (BBB) program.

Even before the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic growth in the Philippines has been slowing down for three years already. The economy nosedived as a result of the lockdown and the implementation of restrictions on production and service activities. In Metro Manila alone, 53% of enterprises in the service sector were forced to close due the lockdown. Approximately 73% of manufacturing operations in the national capital, Calabarzon and Central Luzon were also stopped. The import-export and transportation sectors were put to a halt. Because of this, nearly 23.7 million workers are in danger of losing their jobs. More than 400,000 small and medium enterprises also lost their incomes and are in danger of closing due to bankruptcy. The economic managers of the Duterte regime recently admitted that the local economy shrank by 0.2% during the first quarter of the year, the worst in more than two decades.

In response, the World Bank-trained economic managers of the regime announced the PH-Progreso proposal on May 14. Several associated bills have been filed in Congress.

Lower taxes for big capitalists

The PH-Progreso aims to railroad the lowering down of taxes on corporations as an incentive to foreign capitalists who wish to invest in government programs. This was originally proposed under the Tax Reform for Attracting Better and

Higher Quality Opportunities (Tra-baho) Bill, which later on became the Corporate Income Tax and Incentives Rationalization Act (CITIRA) which is now pending before the Senate. The CITIRA is the second tax reform package which foreign businesses, particularly US companies, have long lobbied for.

Under the new Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (Create) Bill, the corporate income tax will be lowered from 30% to 25%. It will also give the president the authority to tailor-fit tax incentives and exemptions for big companies. The regime aims to implement the reform as early as July by railroading the passage of the said bill before the Congress closes its session on June 5.

Based on conservative estimates of the National Economic Development Authority, the reactionary state will lose about P259 billion in corporate taxes until 2022 should the tax cuts be implemented. Multinationals and companies that rake in billions of profits in the country will primarily benefit from this reform.

Relatedly, Duterte ordered the Bureau of Internal Revenue to issue an order to provide tax exemptions and incentives to big companies that responded to his call for donations amid the pandemic. Under the said regulations issued on April 6, the total amount of financial and material donations given by corporations will be fully deducted from their gross incomes. While cutting

corporate taxes, it imposed heavier taxes on the poor. Invoking his emergency powers, Duterte issued an executive order which implemented a 10% tax increase on imported crude oil and petroleum products. This is expected to result in oil price hikes which will be shouldered by the people in the coming months.

Trillions of funds for BBB

To give a new push to the slow implementation of the BBB program, the regime repackaged its infrastructure projects under the PH-Progreso as a strategy to purportedly create new jobs to address the massive unemployment crisis. In line with this recommendation, Duterte's minion filed the Covid-19 Unemployment Reduction Economic Stimulus (CURES) Bill in Congress.

Through this, the regime will ensure that the P1-trillion funds appropriated for BBB will remain untouched, while allocating an additional P500 billion that will be sourced from loans and funds that will be collected by the Bangko Sentral. The P1.5 trillion fund, which will be disbursed in three stages (P500 billion per year from 2021-2023) will be apportioned by Duterte and his supermajority.

The BBB projects will not create sufficient and long-term employment opportunities. In the past, the much touted program has only contributed one-fourth of the total employment in the construction sector. Corrupt government officials are competing over the implementation of these infrastructure projects as this is where they source their massive kickbacks. Even amid the pandemic and intense hardships experienced by the people, the ruling classes continue to prioritize profiteering to further their self-serving interests. AB

What will happen to Philippine businesses?

Nel owns an internet shop in Metro Manila. She has 10 computers in her garage which she rents out to gamers from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Her customers pay a peso for every four minutes or P15/hour for games. Nel says she can earn P1,300-P1,500 a day or P20,000 to P25,000/month, after subtracting payment for electricity which can reach P12,000 and the P3,000 internet fee.

When the lockdown was imposed, she was forced to close shop as gaming stations were deemed not essential. She lost her income as she relied on what gamers pay her everyday. But even as she stopped operations, she still had to pay her electricity and internet bills. Her meager savings were soon depleted as she provided for her family's daily needs. As she was not categorized as one of the "poorest of the poor," she was not included in the regime's list of food and financial aid beneficiaries.

Like Nel's shop, hundreds of thousands of stores, eateries, parlors, barbers and other small businesses closed shop during the lockdown. Thousands of professionals like consultants, lawyers, musicians and other self-employed lost their income. Small hotels and resorts, eateries and restaurants catering to local and foreign tourists were ordered closed.

According to the reactionary state's data, there are 998,342

small and medium enterprises in the Philippines in 2018. These comprise 99.5% of all establishments in the country. A great majority of these (90%) are micro or enterprises which has nine workers or less and up to P3 million in capital. Almost half of these micro enterprises (427,101) are in wholesale and retail; repair of vehicles and motorcycles, as well as all personal and household items. Next biggest is in the accommodation/food-related subsector (125,396); and third in the manufacturing subsector (103,590). Most small manufacturers are in the food business, such as bakeries. These businesses are wholly- or majority-owned by Filipinos. These are oftentimes managed and operated by families. Most affected are businesses in Luzon which make up two-thirds of the total number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and which employs 3.8 million.

The Duterte regime issued aid for small businesses but in the form

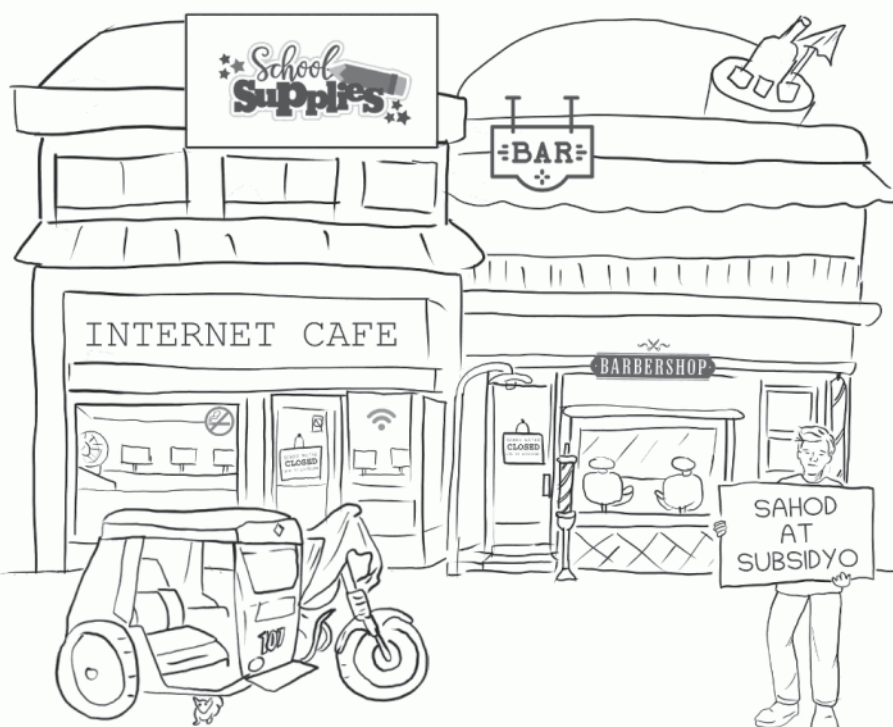
of loans. The Department of Trade and Industry is giving out loans from P200,000 to P500,000 but only registered businesses are qualified. Entrepreneurs estimate that this will only cover rent, electric and water utilities, payment to unpaid debts incurred during the lockdown, and to suppliers for materials spoiled due to the lockdown.

During the 2-month lockdown, small and medium enterprises have used up their emergency funds to pay their workers. The regime's promise of P5,000 to P8,000 wage subsidy was too little and late. In April, only 120,000 applications were approved by the Department of Labor and Employment. The agency terminated its subsidy when it ran out of funds.

Across the nation, 2.7 million workers stand to lose their jobs. This includes 11.5 million self-employed or those who own their businesses, 5.7 million in the informal sector and 10.1 million non-regular wage and salary earners.

Government agencies estimate that around 436,000 businesses were forced to shutdown by the lockdown. Only 117,000 big and small essential businesses were allowed to operate.

To avoid closures, the state needs to pour P79 billion subsidy per month for small and medium-sized businesses. This includes P53.5 billion compensation for 10.7 million workers and P26 billion for businesses in the informal sector. Price control for basic commodities is needed. Payments for loans, rent and utilities should be deferred. The chain of supply should be ensured. Agricultural products need to be bought in a timely manner and at reasonable prices. Loans should be with zero interests. Most significantly, steps should be taken to ensure the health of all returning workers, especially as the Covid-19 threat lingers. AB



Solidarity amid distress in Samar

Peasants from Northern Samar collectively faced the problem brought about by the limited financial aid appropriated by the Duterte regime for those affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Through their revolutionary mass organization, they ensured that every family from barangays Ipil-ipil and Langka (not their real names) would be aided.

In Barangay Ipil-ipil, only 38 out of 64 pamilya were on the list of beneficiaries had received an aid worth P5,000 to P8,000 under the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). As in other barangays, local officials were obligated to impose a quota system.

Members of the peasant organization in Barangay Ipil-ipil, however, decided that all families must receive financial aid, whether or not their names are listed. To achieve this, the beneficiaries pooled together the amount they received and divided it to all families in the barrio. Of the P190,000 they were able to pool together, each family was able to receive an aid of P2,368 each. They included in the central fund the P68 provided by the barangay captain for their fare to and from the town center to buy basic supplies for villagers.

In Barangay Langka, 12 families were not included in the quota that was imposed by the local government. Through the organization's guidance and education campaign, the beneficiaries decided to contribute P600 per family to raise funds for distribution for non-beneficiaries.

In Barangay Ipil-ipil, the organization conducted a mass meeting to explain to residents why they need to help their neighbors who are non-beneficiaries. The organization also helped barangay officials in administering the funds to prevent corruption. Members of the lo-

cal Party branch guided the organization in coming up with the decision. A local NPA unit also helped in forging the unity of villagers.

The organization ensured the secrecy of the meeting and aid distribution to prevent the municipal

government from interfering, especially as local government officials prohibit initiatives that are not in line with their aid distribution protocols even if such benefit the people.

Organizations from other barrios are already replicating the aid distribution initiative. Meanwhile, the revolutionary mass organization in Barangay Ipil-ipil is already preparing to spearhead other campaigns against Covid-19 including food and herbal medicine production. (From Larab, May 9, 2020.) **AB**



Cadres conduct education conference in Negros

THIRTY EDUCATION CADRES from various guerrilla fronts, staff organs and underground mass organizations participated in the first education conference of the Party in Negros. The conference was conducted early on first quarter of the year in a guerrilla front.

The conference discussed and assessed their experiences in implementing the Party's education program in previous years. It stressed the importance of establishing Red Schools in various levels to serve as a machinery in advancing education work.

Each cadre explained the need for an "assiduous, systematic and extensive conduct of studies on the three-level Party course...[and] on courses and lessons under the curriculum of the National Democratic School."

The cadres were determined to advance education work after forging a stronger unity during the conference. The conference was launched with the help of a unit of the New People's Army which secured the area amid the conduct of nonstop military combat operations in the island. (From Ang Paghimakas, May 2020.) **AB**

Duterte regime, to purchase P2.4-B artilerie systems amid crisis

The Duterte regime, last May 12, issued a notice to proceed with the procurement of the artillery systems worth P2.4 billion from Israeli company Elbit Systems amid the continuing economic crisis brought about by Covid-19.

The contract covers the procurement of two ATMOS 2000 155mm/52 Caliber Self-propelled Howitzer Systems, two batteries, with six mobile firing units each, and associated support systems.

The said system has a maximum range of 41 kilometers and a fire rate of 3 rounds/15 seconds on burst mode, 5 rounds/minute on rapid mode, and more than 80 rounds per hour on sustained mode.

The procurement program was made under the AFP modernization program which aims to boost Duterte's arsenal in a vain attempt to fulfill his ambition to decimate the armed revolutionary movement before the end of his term.

The use of oversized cannons and helicopter gunships only results in indiscriminate destruction of communities and the environment, endangers people's lives and livelihood, and causes psychological trauma especially on children.

The first set of artillery system is expected to be delivered in 2021.

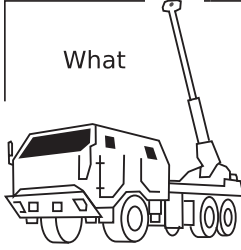
Relatedly, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) of the US Department of State approved last April 30 the Duterte regime's request to buy six AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopters and other war matériel and services worth P75 billion.

Defense Sec. Delfin Lorenzana noted that the price of helicopters is too high and said that the regime could not buy these. However, he made no mention of whether they will still buy the

thousands of missiles, weapons, and other war matériel which are also part of the contract. Lorenzana said that the regime is more inclined to procuring cheaper helicopters from Turkey.

Philippine Ambassador to Washington Jose Romualdez said in an interview last May 13 that the UH-60 Black Hawk Helicopter which the regime purchased last year from the US are set to be delivered soon. The contract for the procurement of 16 helicopters was signed earlier last year for P1.21 billion. The helicopters were bought from PZL Mielec a subsidiary of Lockheed Martin, one of the biggest defense companies and part of the US military-industrial complex. Meanwhile, the BRP Jose Rizal is also set to be delivered to the country on May 23. The ship was purchased along with the BRP Antonio Luna by the regime from Hyundai South Korea for P18 billion.

What



₱2.4 billion?
can get you?

equivalent to any of the following:



160 M
facemasks
(**₱15/mask**)



1.9 M
Covid-19 PCR tests
(**₱1,240/test**)

Isolation for
106,909 individuals
(**₱22,449/14 days**)



16,752
hospitalization
for moderate cases
(**₱143,267/patient**)

3,052
hospitalization
for severe cases
(**₱786,384/patient**)



1 month salary
124,863
contact tracer
(**₱19,221/month**)

1 month salary
74,876 nurses
(**₱32,053/month**)



Bayan Muna seeks Meralco probe

BAYAN MUNA IS seeking an investigation into the sudden spike in the bills charged by the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) on consumers in Metro Manila over the past two months.

As meter reading activities was suspended since March, Meralco based its billing on the average consumption of consumers from December 2019 to February 2020. Actually, however, this has not been followed as in the case of one consumer whose bill drastically spiked from P2,672 in March to P9,358.52 in May.

Bayan Muna pointed out that Meralco is clearly exploiting the pandemic to accumulate more profits while "crucifying consumers." Relatedly, the group called for the junking of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act which is being used by Meralco to monopolize the power industry and continually impose rate hikes. The most recent hike was the P0.105/kilowatt hour rate hike imposed in April.

31st IB, 9th SAF massacre 5 farmers in Sorsogon

Five farmers were massacred by soldiers and police troops SEMPO-style (Synchronized Enhanced Management of Police Operations) in Barangay Dolos, Bulan, Sorsogon on May 8. The victims were Jeric Vuno, Jerry Palanca, Robert Villafuerte, Raymundo Tañada and Jaime Tañada. Jaime Tañada was suffering from the infirmities of old age while Villafuerte was mentally challenged.

The perpetrators made it appear that the farmers were Red fighters, a claim which was vehemently belied by residents. According to witnesses, soldiers ransacked seven houses in the barrio, and arrested and hogtied all male residents. Soldiers mauled the barangay officials who attempted to rescue the victims.

The soldiers brought the five victims at the backyard where they were shot. The cadavers of the victims bore marks of torture. The massacre was perpetrated by the 31st IB, 9th Special Action Force Battalion, Provincial Mobile Force Company of PNP Sorsogon and intelligence units.

Simultaneously, the same units

also attacked the neighboring barangay of Calpi. They ransacked the residences of the Abuyog, Golimlim and Estiller families. They mauled Jeffrey Godala and Jojo Palanca, and two other Estiller minors. The soldiers also stole the residents' money, cellphones and other personal belongings.

SEMPO was first conducted in Negros in 2018-2019 wherein at least 35 peasants were killed. The operations were then spearheaded by Police MGen. Debold Sinas, currently the chief of police in Metro Manila.

In Batangas, police elements also illegally arrested six residents of Barangay Coral ni Lopez, Calaca,

SEMPO-style, in the early morning of May 10. The victims were identified as peasant leaders Leovino Julongbayan, Virgilio Vidal, Marcelo Vidal, Doroteo Bautista, July Julongbayan and Roilan Tenorio.

Meanwhile, elements of the 85th IB arrested farmer Leoben Holeta at a checkpoint in Lopez, Quezon on May 4. Holeta was on his way home after undergoing a medical surgery when he was apprehended together with his mother. **AB**



Militarization in Surigao del Sur terrorizes Lumads

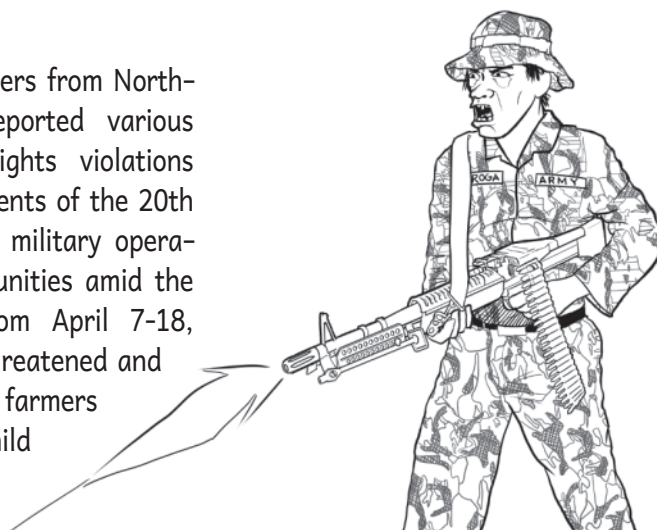
Residents were terrorized upon the arrival of soldiers and police in their communities at Km. 16 and Han-ayan in Barangay Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur last May 19. According to residents, several soldiers entered the Lumad school which is being administered by Alcadev (Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Livelihood Development) in Han-ayan while others entered the houses of residents in search of the leaders of Malahutayong Pakigbisog Alang sa Sumusunod (MAPASU). They also looked for Alcadev coordinator Maricres Pagaran, Fr. Raymond Ambray and Lianga councilor Sammy Dollano. Earlier that day, the police arrested resident Eric Enriquez.

Using fighter jets, the military dropped four bombs near the community at around 3 a.m. on May 12. Five artillery rounds were also fired at the same area.

On the succeeding four days, drones and helicopters were flown overhead across the community. Leaflets stating "surrender now or be infected with Covid-19" were dropped from helicopters.

Meanwhile, farmers from Northern Samar also reported various cases of human rights violations perpetrated by elements of the 20th IB while conducting military operations in their communities amid the Covid-19 crisis. From April 7-18, soldiers harassed, threatened and coerced at least six farmers and a six-year-old child to serve as guides

in their combat operations. The victims are residents of Barangay Deit de Turag, Silvino Lobos. Residents also reported that soldiers assaulted another resident of the village. Soldiers also coerced a resident of Barangay MacArthur, Las Navas to serve as guide in their operations last April 18. **AB**



Mass protests amid lockdowns

Lockdowns have failed to stop people from mounting mass protest actions across the globe to condemn mounting human rights violations, and worsening poverty and unemployment amid the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Lebanon, thousands of citizens marched on the streets on April 27 to oppose the drastic economic downturn and the lack of aid amid the pandemic. They said that they could die from hunger due to the negligence of the government than from the disease itself.

Two thousand individuals protested in Israel while maintaining a two-meter distance from each other last April 19 to condemn the anti-democratic measures implemented by the Netanyahu regime. Among these are the restrictions on assembly and the conduct of mass surveillance.

In Latin America, protest actions erupted from various communities to demand adequate aid. Urban poor residents went out of their

communities to protest in Chile. Noise barrages were also mounted in El Salvador. In Colombia, urban poor residents who lost their jobs also protested in their respective communities. These spontaneous protests since March are being spearheaded by semiproletariats.

In France, 250 workers formed a human chain last May 11 to condemn the lockdown which continues to result in violence and worsening forms of inequality.

In Belgium, health workers condemned their government's inutility in addressing the Covid-19 crisis. On March 16, they turned their backs on Belgium's prime minister upon her arrival at a hospital. They criticized the implementation of health budget cuts and low wages for health workers. AB



NDFP, armed movements support UN's appeal

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC Front of the Philippines (NDFP) signed on May 5 a joint petition which called on governments to heed the United Nation's (UN) call for a temporary global ceasefire and release of political prisoners. UN said that these are important measures in the fight against Covid-19.

The petition was signed by the NDFP, member organizations of the Resistance and Liberation Movements Network, Inter Alia, The Basque Movement, The Peace Dialogue Delegation-National Liberation Army-Colombia, The Kurdistan National Congress, armed ethnic organizations in Myanmar, the Euro-Burma Office, and Dr. Sai Oo of the Union Peace and Dialogue Joint Committee of Myanmar.

However, the group said many governments refuse to heed the UN's call for a global ceasefire, and instead exploited the situation to intensify their repressive policies. They also noted that those who were freed in several countries are criminals who were convicted of grave criminal charges. AB