



EDITORIAL

## Engulf the corrupt and fascist Duterte with waves of protests

**D**uterte is like a cornered monster subdued by the seething anger of the people disgusted over cases of large-scale corruption amid the pandemic, economic crisis and mass suffering. The tyrant's throne is being rocked by a political crisis threatening to explode. The Filipino people must take advantage of this prevailing crisis by pushing their democratic struggles against the corrupt, terrorist and tyrannical regime.

Duterte's "anti-corruption" signboard is now in tatters. Clearly, it was used over the past five years to cover up and conceal the systematic and widespread thievery and plunder of the people's coffers and accumulation of wealth. The initial report of the Commission on Audit (COA) and Senate investigations have exposed the direct involvement Duterte himself and his closest underlings in these anomalies.

Duterte abused his power amid the health crisis. He took advantage of the pandemic to divert the people's money to buy overpriced face masks, face shields and personal

protective equipment (PPE) from his favored questionable Chinese company. Senate and COA investigations will likely expose similar and worse anomalous deals.

Corruption under the Duterte government is one of the biggest factors behind the failure of governance in the face of the worsening Covid-19 pandemic in the country. Duterte and his accomplices prioritized their pockets instead of raising the country's capacity to confront the grave health crisis. While Duterte and the bureaucrat capitalists fattened themselves by robbing and squandering the peo-

ple's money, the people suffered from oppressive lockdowns, lack of mass testing, contact tracing and hospitals and medical facilities, slow vaccine roll-out, neglect of nurses and healthcare workers, widespread unemployment, loss of livelihood and income and paltry economic aid.

The pandemic in the country continues to worsen because of government neglect and failure. Duterte's officials only admitted that the lockdowns have become ineffective, to avoid the responsibility of providing aid to the people and not to push for the strengthening of the health system. The plan to carry out granular or localized lockdowns are bound to fail amid widespread infections and lack of mass testing and tracing. The surge of daily new cases to around 20,000 threatens to further increase in the coming

weeks. Hospitals are overwhelmed and many sick people—not only of Covid-19—are being denied medical attention.

The worsening pandemic is accompanied by intensified oppression and violence against the people. The campaign of murder against leaders and those active in people's struggles has not relented, neither have the arrests, legal charges, threats, red-tagging and "forced surrender" against those who stand against the fascist regime. Billions of pesos continue to be squandered for bombings, shelling and strafing in military operations in the countryside that unleashes terrorism against the peasant masses.

Amid the pandemic and crisis, the Filipino people's seething anger against the Duterte regime can no longer be restrained. Duterte responds with more lies and deception, bullying and arm-twisting to manipulate the Filipinos sentiments and views. Duterte's style, however, can no longer win over the people's support because these are clearly used only to grab more wealth and

power.

Because of Duterte's ambitions to stay in power beyond 2022 and cement their dynasty in Malacañang, support has slowly eroded even among his allies among the Marcoses and Arroyos. They undertake independent maneuvers to position their factions for the upcoming elections. Even his own PDP-Laban party split because of Duterte's push to run as vice president, which he uses as leverage to win more political gains.

A political crisis threatens to explode as Duterte clings to power amid the pandemic, destruction of the economy and people's livelihood and exposure of large-scale corruption under his regime.

There are intensifying contradictions within the ruling classes and between the ruling fascist regime and the people which can lead to major showdowns even before the elections. In the face of Duterte's maneuvers, more and more are becoming open to the idea of ending the tyranny even before next year's elections.

The situation favors advancing the mass struggles to end Duterte's tyrannical regime. The anti-Duterte united front is ever expanding and consolidating as more and more organizations and personalities are being roused to take a stand and openly speak against the corruption and failure of the ruling fascist regime.



The Filipino

people must take advantage of the situation to tirelessly advance their struggles to defend their rights and welfare. The people's strength must be built in the factories, hospitals and offices, campus and communities, and their consciousness and determination to fight must be roused through studies, meetings and assemblies. Let the streams of protest merge into a giant wave of people marching in the streets.

Link the struggles in the cities with the struggles in the countryside and amplify the demand of the peasant masses for land and rights amid the openly brutal campaign of suppression of the military and police.

The New People's Army must also intensify its tactical offensives and target the worst of the fascist criminals. Make the thunderclap of the armed victories echo the clamor for the overthrow of the monster Duterte. AB



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## Contents

**Editorial:** Engulf the corrupt and fascist Duterte with waves of protests 1

4 NPA offensives in Samar 3

Tribute to Samar and Negros martyrs 3

50 join KM-EV 3

Underpaid heroes 4

Protests 4

Duterte's stench of corruption 5

Squandering funds in counter-insurgency 5

Palaweños are denied aid 6

Army guns down peasant in Bukidnon 6

Lawyer and activist, killed 6

In brief 7

I-Kalinga's struggle vs. dams 8

Who will learn when schools are closed? 9

Wilting under pricey veggies 10

Bitter conditions in bitter gourd production 10

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## NPA mounts 4 offensives in Samar

Units of the New People's Army (NPA) mounted successive armed actions in Samar last August.

In Northern Samar, two elements of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) were killed in Barangay Happy Valley, San Isidro on August 21. On the same day, a soldier of the 43rd IB was killed during an encounter in Barangay Palanit.

Earlier on August 19, a police operative was killed during an encounter in Barangay Geparayan, Silvino Lobos. On August 17, Red

fighters sniped at elements of the 20th IB in Barangay Epaw, Las Navas. A soldier was killed during the said action. The operating military unit also retreated from the area after two days.

The NPA-Western Samar (Arnulfo Ortiz Command) mounted a harassment operation against a 7-man unit of the 63rd IB at Sitio Burabod, Barangay Mabini, Basey, Western Samar on August 7.

In Negros Oriental, two military officers and a CAFGU element were killed in partisan operations mounted by the NPA-Central Negros (Leonardo Panaligan Command). An Ingram pistol and ammunition were confiscated from them. The first operation was mounted in Barangay Trinidad, Guihulngan City on August 18, while the two other military actions were mounted on September 2 and 3 in Barangay Pinukawan, Vallehermoso, and Barangay Nasunggan, La Libertad, respectively. **AB**

## CPP pays tribute to martyrs of Samar and Negros

The Communist Party of the Philippines and the revolutionary movement paid tribute to the Red fighters of the New People's Army (NPA) who were killed in Eastern Samar and Negros Occidental in August while performing their revolutionary duties.

The Party declared the 19 individuals who perished in Barangay Osmeña, Dolores, Eastern Samar last August 16 during the brutal bombing operation of the military as "best sons and daughters of the people. The Dolores Martyrs were part of a 50-strong NPA unit conducting political, economic and education work for the peasant masses in the said area. The unit included a team of medics who were scheduled to provide medical training, and perform a minor operation in the area.

"The deaths of the Dolores martyrs is a big loss," said the Party. "It is, however, a temporary setback and does not negate the overall forward direction of the people's war."

The Party also paid tribute to Kerima Lorena Tariman (Ka Ella) who was captured and killed by the military on August 20 in Barangay Kapitan Ramos, Silay City, Negros Occidental. She was killed along with another Red fighter Joery Dato-on Cocuba (Ka Pabling). Based

on the investigation of NPA-Negros, Ka Ella was only slightly wounded when she was captured during an encounter, and was later summarily executed by the soldiers.

Many paid tribute to Ka Ella, a Red fighter and Party cadre who was known for her poems and literary pieces which reflect the plight, aspirations and struggle of the toiling masses. The NPA-Negros gave a heartfelt recognition of Ka Ella's contributions to the armed revolution in the island. She was also given tribute by Makibaka, Kabataang Makabayan, and various NPA units, as well as the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in Kurdistan.

She was also remembered by the organizations she once was part of. Before joining the NPA, she was known for being a poet, writer and activist for peasants. She became a part of the Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura for a decade. She was first organized when she was still a student at the University of the Philippines. **AB**

### 50 join KM-EV

AROUND 50 YOUNG peasants pledged membership to the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) during a conference in a guerrilla front in Eastern Visayas on August 21.

Under the theme "Let the youth support the mass movement in the barrios! Join the New People's Army! Fight AFP fascism," they united and reviewed the historic tasks of the sector in advancing the revolution. The conference discussed various issues faced by the sector including the safe opening of schools, and the continuing harassment and fascist attacks mounted by the fascist regime.

"The youth sees no future under the Duterte regime," said Ka Mori, chairperson of the local KM chapter in the barrio. New members pledged to uphold the unity to fight and overcome the intensifying militarization in their respective communities. They also pledged to continuously tread the revolutionary path and serve as a wellspring of revolutionaries.

## Heroes who are underpaid and deprived of benefits

August 31 has come and passed marking the failure of the Department of Health (DOH) to meet the 10-day deadline it set to give health workers their due benefits. This was the reason why nurses and other health workers walked out from at least 10 hospitals in Metro Manila on August 30 and September 1. They also protested in front of the DOH office in Manila to demand the immediate resignation of Sec. Francisco Duque III. Similar protest actions were mounted in Baguio City, Pampanga, Iloilo City, Bacolod City, Samar, Leyte and Isabela.

Health workers are utterly enraged at successive reports issued recently which exposed the failure of the regime to obligate funds on the one hand, and widespread corruption on the other hand. These anomalies have already become the trademark of the Duterte regime's failed pandemic response. The benefits that health workers are denied include the legislated special risk allowance (SRA). Because of the protests, the Department of Budget and Management was obliged to release ₱311 million and ₱888 million last week which cover the SRA of 120,000 health workers who rendered health care services to Covid-19 patients from December 2020 until June.

Nurses and health workers's unions asserted that all health workers, including non-medical staff and those who give medical care to non-Covid-19 patients, must be provided the SRA. These include ambulance drivers and orderlies who are at risk of getting infected wherever they are assigned, and whatever their work is in their respective workplaces.

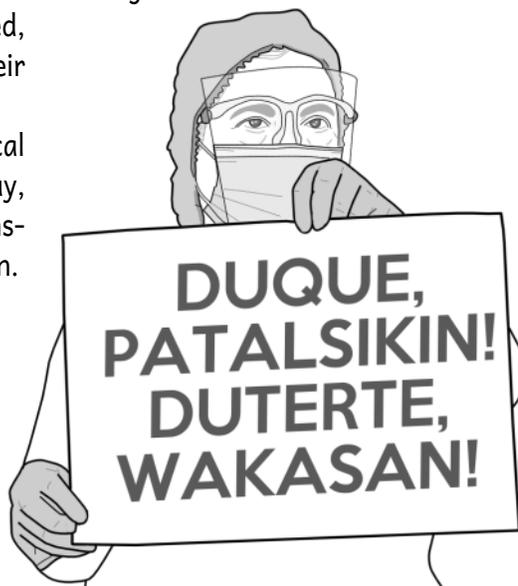
On top of the SRA, medical workers also demand a hazard pay, as well as allowances for transportation, meals and accommodation. In the case of the Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center, 70% of the budget (₱39.2 million) allocated for the transportation allowance of health workers from September to December remain unobligated.

Many workers have already

succumbed to the virus, got infected, or were forced to resign or retire. This further narrowed down the number of health workers which is already low, and further weakened the already deteriorating health system especially amid the rapid spread of infections due to the Delta variant.

Just recently, Covid-19 infections in the country already soared to over 2 million. Many hospitals declared full capacity and could no longer accept patients. Of the 33,000 who died, 103 were health workers.

According to the Alliance of Health Workers, health workers attempted to have a dialogue with the the DOH prior to the protest but they were just ignored by the department. Duque reasoned that only ₱1 billion was allocated for their benefits, despite the fact that ₱59 billion is needed for this. Worse, no funds were allocated for health workers in the 2022 national budget. AB



**Just benefits for Asia Brewery workers.** Workers of Asia Brewery in Cabuyao, Laguna protested on September to demand living wages and benefits. The workers have been negotiating their collective bargaining agreement with the management for more than eight months now. They pointed out that they continued to work for the company even amid the pandemic, yet they remain underpaid. Asia Brewery is owned by capitalist Lucio Tan who posted a 10.9% increase (₱6.08 billion) in net income in 2020.

**Aid during *tiempo muerto*.** More than 300 farm workers under the National Federation of Sugar Workers marched to the provincial capitol in Bacolod City on August 25 to demand the release of funds allocated to aid farmers amid the *tiempo muerto* (off-milling season in sugar plantations).

**Commemoration of the Lianga Massacre.** Human rights groups lighted candles in front of the Commission on Human Rights in Quezon City on September 1 to mark the sixth anniversary of the Lianga Massacre. Justice is yet to be served to the families of Emerito Samarca, executive director of ALCADDEV and Lumad leaders Juvello Sinzo and Dionel Campos.

**Groups condemn budget for corruption.** Various sectors protested in front of the House of Representatives in Quezon City in September 3 to condemn the corrupt, puppet and oppressive Duterte government. The protest was held in conjunction with the deliberation of the 2022 budget proposal of the Office of the President. They said that funds allocated for pork barrel, corruption and suppression must be removed from the budget.

## Duterte's stench of corruption

**R**odrigo Duterte can no longer hold off the rotten stench of his regime. In the past weeks, big cases of plunder involving his closest factotums and anomalous favored companies have been continually unearthed.

From the onset, Duterte maneuvered to monopolize public funds in the name of fighting the pandemic. The rubberstamp Congress passed the Bayanihan 1 which granted him ₱275 billion in funds and the authority to bypass allocation and procurement procedures.

Duterte appointed Wendell Avisado and Christopher Lao, lawyers who both served him before becoming president, to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). Using their positions, Duterte pocketed at least ₱1 billion in government purchase of overpriced

face masks, face shields, personal protective equipments (PPEs) and test kits. He even decreed the wearing of face shields to create and maintain demand for the product.

On Duterte's orders, the agency bought face masks at ₱27 each and face shields at ₱120 despite having supplies at only ₱13 and ₱27 apiece. It also bought test kits at ₱1,720 each, even when these can be bought at ₱925 apiece, and PPEs at ₱1,910 when there were supplies at ₱945 each.

Two Chinese companies were favored—Pharmally Pharmaceutical

Corporation and Philippine Blue Cross Biotech Corporation. Pharmally was only incorporated in September 2019 with a capital investment of ₱260,666 but Lao granted it eight contracts worth ₱8.7 billion. The company raked in profits amounting to ₱7.5 billion in 2020 from zero in 2019. Meanwhile, Blue Cross Biotech's net income rose from ₱260,666 in 2019 to ₱12.2 million in 2020. Pharmally is owned by Huang Wen Lie and his son Huang Tzu Yen, both partners of Michael Yang, one of Duterte's special economic advisers. Yang's name first surfaced in 2017 when he was named by a retired general as a drug lord involved in smuggling shabu in the country. **AB**

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## Public funds squandered in counterinsurgency

**T**he criminal prioritization of the defense sector and counterinsurgency war amid the public health crisis is evident in reports issued by the Commission on Audit (COA) in recent months. On top of the huge chunk of funds allocated to the military and police, COA exposed the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) cornered million of pesos of funds from other civilian agencies.

During the second week of July, COA exposed anomalies on how the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) utilized billions of pesos allocated to them. COA pointed out that the agencies failed to utilize ₱9.4 billion allocated for various contracts and projects. COA revealed that the AFP and PNP failed to deliver on time 41 projects worth ₱6.8 billion, while nine military projects worth ₱940.5 million were suspended. The PNP Special Action Force also failed to deliver projects worth ₱1.7 billion. The AFP and PNP failed to explain where these funds are.

COA also questioned the

anomalous transfer of ₱162.9-million funds of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to the NTF-ELCAC for the implementation of its programs. COA revealed that around ₱160 million in scholarship funds was transferred by TESDA to its regional offices for the implementation of NTF-ELCAC programs in 2020. More than a fourth of the said funds (₱41.95 million) were allocated to the Davao Region which is dominated by the Dutertes. Additionally, the DILG transferred ₱2.9 million to its regional offices in Mindanao also

for the implementation of NTF-ELCAC activities without proper documentation.

The National Commission on the Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)-Caraga was also flagged for its anomalous and lavish utilization of more than ₱1 million for a "workshop" by the NTF-ELCAC in Agusan del Norte on November 2020. The said activity was held at a beach resort in Agusan del Norte at the time when mass gatherings were still prohibited. The NCIP is notorious for squandering public funds lavish expenses. Last year, the commission was also flagged for spending ₱4.8 million on expensive hotels and restaurants.

The COA pointed out that government agencies cannot just use the Executive Order 70, which created the NTF-ELCAC, to transfer funds without the approval of Congress. **AB**

## Palaweños are denied aid

Palaweños have been experiencing hardships and hunger due to successive lockdowns imposed across the province. They are further burdened by the convoluted, slow, and unfair distribution of funds under the Special Amelioration Program (SAP) and other aid from the reactionary government. Aside from complaints, the distribution of funds were riddled with allegations of corruption and favoritism.

In Brooke's Point, many families were not able to receive any material or financial aid. Village officials' was that they were not in the list of beneficiaries or that they have already received aid under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Residents also complained that only relatives and supporters of a barangay official were given full financial aid.

In Rizal, discrimination against the minority Palaw'ans was evident in the distribution of aid. They only received five *salops* (dry measure of 3 liters) of rice, while non-minority

beneficiaries received a half cavan of rice and ₱1,500. In one indigenous community, soldiers summoned residents at the barangay hall and threatened to kill those who would not come and accused them of being members of the NPA. At the barangay hall, the soldiers made fun of the minorities with a game of popping balloons with their buttocks to win a pack of noodles as first prize.

In Quezon, only a few beneficiaries received the full ₱8,000 financial aid. Some reported receiving only ₱1,500-₱2,500. Resi-

dents of Barangay Isugod did not receive ₱5,000. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) obliged residents to work for the barangay in exchange for aid. They were made to sign documents and promised to receive an aid of ₱3,200 after rendering service. On May 18, they were ordered to clean the streets and carry drums. Even after August passed, they have yet to receive the aid.

In Roxas, the ₱5,000-financial aid promised by DOLE in February is yet to be distributed to residents. In three neighboring barangays, the department only managed to make residents sign registration documents.

These were the same issues faced by residents in 2020 when they only received two *salops* of rice, coffee, sugar and two pieces of soap. <sup>AB</sup>

### 89th IB guns down peasant leader in Bukidnon

FARMER VENERADA GUINANAO, member of the Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women-Bukidnon, was killed after elements of the 89th IB strafed her house at Purok 5, Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon on August 19. Her husband Reynaldo Guinanao and son Christian were wounded in the incident. The couple are members of the Buffalo-Tamaraw-Limus (BTL), while Reynaldo is a leader of KASAMA-Bukidnon. BTL is a local peasant organization opposed to landgrabbing by the Central Mindanao University. In 2020, the NTF-ELCAC coerced members of the said organization to "surrender" as "Red fighters."

In Misamis Oriental, suspected state agents gunned down Gerald Ral, member of the Balingasag Farmers Association and Hiniusang Mag-uuma sa Blanco in Lagonglong town on August 21. He and his brother were on their way to the market to deliver bananas when he was killed. Ral has long been subjected to harassment by the 58th IB and accused of being an NPA member.

In Gamay and Mapanas, Northern Samar, five farmers were strafed by the Special Action Force on August 6 and 15. The policemen mistook the victims as Red fighters.

In Sorsogon, state forces illegally arrested farmer Ruel Habitan Escolano, 59, in Barangay San Pascual, Casiguran on August 20, whom they accuse of being an NPA member. He was slapped with trumped up charges of rape and frustrated murder.

### Lawyer, activist, killed

SUSPECTED STATE AGENTS ambushed Atty. Rex Fernandez who was aboard his vehicle in Banawa, Cebu City on August 26. Fernandez gave legal assistance to vendors of the Carbon public market in their fight against privatization. He also gave legal assistance to the activists who were arrested for protesting against the Anti-Terror Law last June 2020. Fernandez is the 57th lawyer killed under the Duterte government.

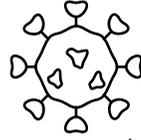
Meanwhile, the lifeless body of a missing activist from Cebu was recently surfaced. Suspected state agents surfaced the body of Elena Tijamo, development worker and member of the Farmers Development Center last month. They made it appear that Tijamo died of complications following a goiter operation in Metro Manila. She was abducted on June 13, 2020 from her house in Barangay Kampingganon, Bantayan Island.

—IN—SHORT

22,415

new cases of Covid-19

infections were recorded on September 6, the highest since the pandemic began.



Δδ

70%

of the new cases of Covid-19 patients

in the Philippines tested positive to the Delta variant. Of the 748 patients who were tested by the Philippine Genome Center across 13 regions on August 27, 516 patients tested positive to the said variant.

27.9%

positivity rate based on the 66,225 tests

reported on August 27. This is six times higher than standard positivity rate of 5% set by the World Health Organization which indicates that the infection has been controlled.

1,038 families



of victims of killings under Duterte's war on drugs submitted their respective representations to the International Criminal Court from June 28 to August 13 to push the investigation on Duterte's crimes.

P133.9 billion projected revenues

projected revenues to be collected in 2021 from the oppressive TRAIN Law which levied additional taxes since 2018. The biggest amount will come from taxes on petroleum products (P105.7 billion), sugar-sweetened beverages (P43.4 billion), and value-added tax (P29.3 billion).

Source: Ibon Foundation

17,500 or 30%

of global tree species are at risk of extinction across the globe,

440 of which have fewer than 50 individuals left in the wild. Majority (1,788) of the trees that are at risk of extinction can be found in Brazil due to massive denudation and forest fires which ravaged the Amazon in recent years.

3 of 5

Filipinos said their income fell during the pandemic.



According to the COVID-19 Pulse PH, 40% said it was due to difficulty in maintaining regular income due to lockdown restrictions, while 32% had a source of income, but was much lower than last year.

Source: United Nations Development Program, Zero Extreme Poverty 2030



Sosin Bîrhat

commander of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) of the Kurdish people

who was martyred in a bombing operation of the Turkish Armed Forces in Rojava on August 19. She served as a member of the YPJ Military Council and was at the forefront of military campaigns and resistance against the occupation Turkish and Islamic State forces in Northern and Eastern Syria.

# Oppression against i-Kalingas and their struggle against dams

The people of Kalinga are facing a huge threat with the impending implementation of 15 hydropower projects which were recently awarded to nine companies directly or indirectly owned by big capitalists. At least three of these can be considered as megadam projects which will require reservoirs with a minimum depth of 15 meters capable of containing 3 million cubic meters of water. In general, these dams aim to generate 468.43 megawatts of electricity or 5.4% of the total Luzon Grid output.

The reactionary state has long claimed that such projects will spur development and should not be opposed by national minorities. This reasoning highlights the national oppression minorities face on top of their basic problems of landlessness, lack of decent livelihood, and exploitation as workers and farmers.

The i-Kalinga minorities, in particular, will mainly face landgrabbing of their ancestral lands by private companies. These lands are the primary source of their livelihood, and crucial to their culture and history. Even if they will not be immediately displaced, they will eventually lose ownership over the land as it will be under the control, operation and infrastructure of private companies..

These projects will change the residents way of life. They will no longer be able to catch fish or work in the area.

The construction of dams will result in massive floods and environmental destruction. By changing the natural course of the rivers, communities are set to experience worse floods during strong typhoons, especially those near the Chico river and tributaries linked to it.

The floods and construction of facilities for the said projects are expected to result in soil erosion. Trees will have to be cut to pave way for the construction of facilities.

This will adversely affect the fauna and flora of Kalinga.

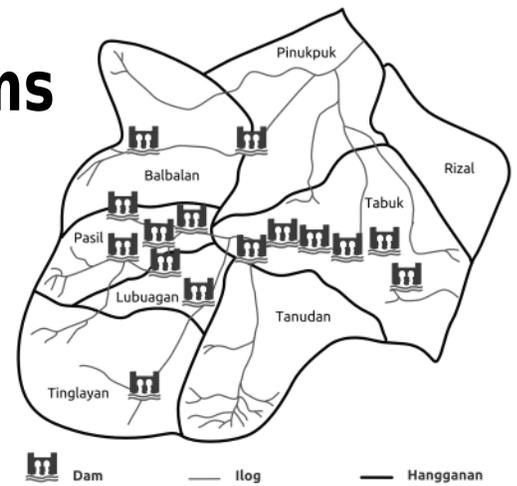
The construction of these projects are accompanied by fascist attacks and threats against the i-Kalingas by energy companies and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) deployed to harass and threaten people who oppose the destructive projects. For instance, the Charlie Company of the 50th IB was assigned to secure the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project and ensure the immediate completion of the project.

These projects will result in the ethnocide of the i-Kalinga people. These hydropower projects will aggravate the people's hardships to ensure superprofits for a few capitalists.

Contrary to claims by capitalists that these dam projects will give free electricity to residents, the power that will be generated by these dams will exclusively be transmitted to the national grid and sold to the National Power Corporation.

All these hydropower projects are owned by private companies. For example, the Chico Hydropower Project is owned by Enrique Razon Jr., in partnership with Oscar Violago. Like other businesses, these projects are profit-driven and not service-oriented.

These projects will only generate limited and temporary jobs. The Chico Run-Of-River Hydropower



Project, for instance, will only generate 2,000 temporary jobs for construction workers, in addition to 19 workers who will ensure the daily operation of the project.

The i-Kalinga people have long been defending their rights by struggling against the construction of dams. They do so in the various forms of resistance and struggle even amid the pandemic.

Affected residents also did not give their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) to the project. This is despite intense attacks and deception employed by electricity companies in connivance with the National Commission on the Indigenous Peoples.

Among those they oppose vigorously is the Upper Tabuk Hydropower Project which has failed to start its construction since 2008 in the face of resistance by affected tribes and residents. The same is true with the status of the Chico Run-Of-River Hydropower Project which started to secure the FPIC of residents in 2016 and was supposed to have been completed in 2019. FPIC proceedings are currently suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The i-Kalingas continues to unite and struggle in the face of attacks, deception and bribery employed by the companies along with armed state agents. Their united clamor is clear: *Botad tako losan!*

AB

# Who will learn if schools are closed?

On September 5, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers reiterated the need to reopen schools this academic year. This came after the Department of Education (DepEd) announced last August that schools will continue to operate under the failed and burdensome blended learning system this coming September 13. This is in compliance with Rodrigo Duterte's order to wait until everybody is vaccinated against Covid-19. Given the sluggish rate of vaccination in which only 12.51% of the population is vaccinated, students will surely wait for a very long time before returning to their classrooms.

The Philippines is one of only five countries in the world which has refused to reopen schools since the pandemic. School closures in the Philippines are the longest in the entire Asia-Pacific region. In February, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) reported that the Philippines is the third among countries with the highest number of students affected by school closures. Around 25 million students have missed almost all classroom instruction time since March 2020.

In its report, Unicef discussed the adverse effects of school closure. Primary of these is learning loss, especially of students who cannot afford to study under the remote learning system. This also denies many students of nutrition from school feeding programs.

Children and youth also become more vulnerable to abuses, including sexual abuses, and early pregnancy, forced labor, and involvement in violent activities when they are not able to go outside their homes.

Separating students from their classmates and friends also adversely affects their mental health. According to the National Center for Mental Health, the number of children suffering from stress increased as a result of being locked down in their houses.

School closures also tremendously burden parents. They were not prepared for it and have no skills to facilitate distance learning. In many cases, their livelihoods are put at stake just to take care of their children at home.

Even teachers have not

prepared for distance learning. Despite their eagerness to teach, they often face problems in preparing their modules. Many teachers were also laid off due to school closures.

In addition, Unicef also identified millions of students who did not enroll for this coming academic year. In 2021, only 12.7 million students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 enrolled, or only more than half (51%) of the number of enrollees in 2020.

Students, parents and teachers have long been complaining about the hardships caused by remote learning, and demanding the safe reopening of schools. In college in which limited face-to-face classes are allowed in medical-related courses, only 1% of students were infected with the virus.

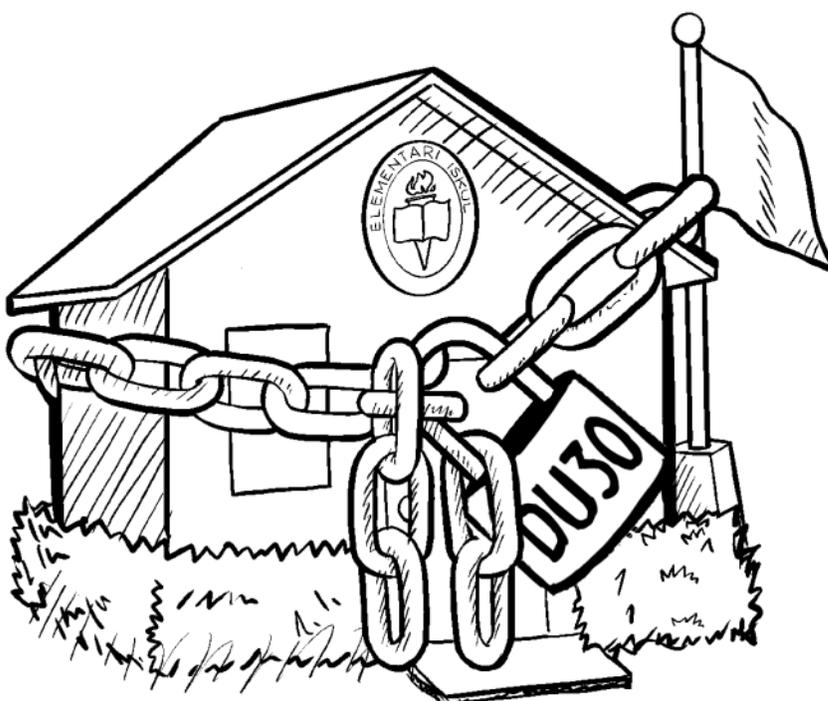
While new variants are causing a rise of infections, Unicef asserted the possibility of implementing a phased reopening of schools, beginning in low-risk areas. This can be

done on a voluntary basis with proper safety protocols in place.

Even decades prior to the pandemic, the country was already beset by shortages in public school infrastructures and services. The shortage in public classrooms was already at 110,000 in 2020. As a result, classrooms originally designed for 40 students is shared by an average of 75-80 students. Classrooms are extremely lacking and would not suffice should classes be reopened under the pandemic, wherein only 15-20 students will be allowed per classroom to maintain social distancing.

In 2016-2020, the Duterte government managed to construct only 4,507 classrooms, or a measly 4.06% of the total amount needed to address the shortage.

Health facilities in schools are not sufficient to meet health standards. Data from the Department of Education itself indicates that only 28% of the total number of schools have clinics as of 2020. There is also a shortage in school nurses. On average, there is only one nurse for every 6,000 students. Around 3,000 schools lack even basic facilities for handwashing. The Duterte regime has not done anything to resolve these issues. AB



# Wilting under costly veggies

Vegetable prices spiked drastically last month. In Metro Manila, the price per kilo of cabbage (₱300) reportedly increased by 375%. The price of Chinese cabbage and carrots also doubled, while the prices of eggplants rose by 75%, and squash and bitter gourd by 25%.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) blamed the increase in prices and supply shortage to typhoon Fabian and southwest monsoon which lashed various parts of Luzon during the last week of July. Even prior to this, however, the country has long been facing a worsening decline in vegetable supplies. The DA itself warned earlier this year that the country will face a vegetable shortage of 434,840 metric tons (MT) this year. The shortage is being used by the department to further liberalize the importation of vegetables.

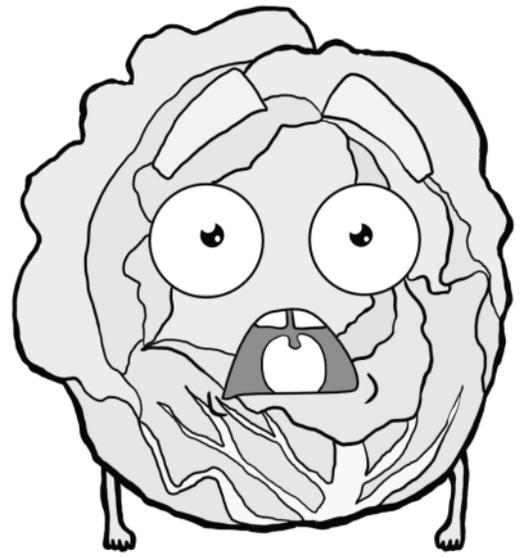
An average of 2 million MT of vegetables are consumed by Filipinos every year, or equivalent to 18.24 kilos per capita. Estimated other uses for vegetables such as seeds, feeds and waste was projected at around 136,934 MT.

## Declining production

Since 1995, vegetable produc-

tion in the Philippines has been dwindling due to the liberalization of agricultural trade in compliance to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Not even half of the vegetables produced locally in 1996 (4.8 million tons) is projected to be produced this year. The decline in vegetable production is primarily a result of bankruptcies faced by farmers due to all-out liberalization.

The local garlic sector faced the worst impact of vegetable trade liberalization. In the 1990s, 100% of the garlic consumed in the country was produced locally. In 2020, 91% of the total garlic supply was already imported. This same problem has affected the production of munggo beans and onions, in which 51% and 39% are now imported respectively. Among vegetables imported by the country in 2019, munggo beans recorded the highest



volume at 36,656 MT which is valued at ₱1.7 billion, followed by onions (23,590 MT or equivalent to ₱261.8 million).

Along with massive use-conversion, the production and area of vegetable farms in the country continues to decrease. Latest data indicate that 240,724 hectares of land in the country are devoted to the production of the nine primary vegetables in the country in 2020. This is 6,365 hectares less compared to the vegetable land area in 2016 when the regime Duterte came into power. Vegetables planted in these areas include bitter melon, cabbage, cassava, eggplant, munggo beans, onion, potato, sweet potato and tomato. A huge portion of vegetable farms are located in Ilocos, Cordillera, Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Northern Mindanao, Bangsamoro and Eastern Visayas. Majority of vegetables in Metro Manila are sourced from Benguet in Cordillera.

Among the vegetables imported by the country in 2020, onion recorded the biggest volume (40,585 MT or ₱2.03 billion), followed by munggo beans (26,980 MT or ₱1.8 billion) and garlic (23,590 MT or ₱1.82 billion). Almost all of the imported garlic, and more than a third of imported onions in local markets were sourced from China. Around 80% of the total munggo bean imports were from Indonesia and Myanmar.

## Bitter conditions in bitter melon production

TATAY KALOY IS a 60-year old bitter melon farmer in Southern Mindanao. He is landless and only rents a half-hectare land in order to farm. In an interview with him by comrades, he narrated how he suffered losses during the last planting season.

He said that the regular planting and harvesting cycle of bitter melon takes about four to six months. During the last planting season, he spent at least ₱12,600 for farm inputs including seeds, fertilizer, pesticide, wires and straw ties. On top of this, he occasionally employs other farm workers to help him plant and harvest at a rate of ₱200/day. In the past, he was able to harvest 24 times and produce up to 336-408 kilos of bitter melon. He sold his products at ₱35/kilo, enabling him to earn a net income of ₱14,208. Deducting the cost of production, he was left with almost no profit.

Tatay Kaloy is one of the many farmers who continue to suffer from the backward and manual farming in the country, and the lack of subsidy in the form of farm inputs, cheap credit and irrigation.