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Editorial

Arroyo, the desperate puppet

Gloria Arroyo desperately clings to power in her relentless desire to raid the nation's coffers and escape trial after 2010 for plunder, violations of human rights and other crimes against humanity. She desperately wants to obtain the blessings of her imperialist master to remain president. As a desperate puppet, she is ever so ready to cede the nation's sovereignty, betray the people's interests and auction off their rights to the American imperialists.

In the eight years she has headed the reactionary state, her subservience to US imperialism has been unprecedented in the history of the puppet republic. Thus, she is worried no end when she sees that her master seems to be giving her the cold shoulder.

Just a few weeks back, Arroyo had gone on a trip to the US where she hurried to crash a prayer meeting on the chance that newly elected US president Barack Obama, who would be attending, would take notice of her. Arroyo was dying for a photo op with Obama. She failed to land one, despite having spent \$123 million of the people's money for this trip.

Newly appointed US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton deigned to grant her a brief audience. Clinton, however, declined Arroyo's request to include the Philippines in the itinerary of her first major Asian trip last February to hold talks with heads of state the US considers the continent's key leaders.

Not wanting to come home appearing empty-handed, Arroyo made the dubious claim of clinching during her trip the measly compensation the US government granted Filipino veterans of World War II. In truth, Arroyo had nothing to do with its approval.

Almost at the same time, revelations were leaked to the public about a World Bank (WB) report that had

already been released to various government agencies in the Philippines as far back as 2006 and 2007. The reports detail the involvement of Gloria Arroyo's husband, Mike in cornering contracts for WB-funded projects and milking companies in on the bid-rigging after they land huge contracts. Coming close on the heels of these revelations was the release by the US State Department of a "Country Report on Human Rights Practices in 2008" citing widespread corruption



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of government officials and rampant violations of human rights, among other socio-economic ills plaguing the country.

All things considered, the US government report contained nothing new. Arroyo nonetheless fears that all this may be indicative of a policy shift by the US regarding support for her regime.

For the past eight years, the US government extended military, political and economic support to a puppet regime beset with grave charges of corruption, human rights violations and treason, in exchange for Arroyo's total support for imperialist "globalization" and for the Bush government's global war of terror.

Even as the new US administration may be tinkering with the possibility of a change of cards, it will continue to press Arroyo to become a much more servile puppet. The Arroyo regime is ever so willing to obediently carry out every policy, scheme and design dictated by its imperialist master in a desperate attempt to obtain whatever blessings it may continue to receive from the new US administration. Arroyo is desperate to prove that

she can be Obama's pet.

In particular, the Arroyo regime can be expected to do the following:

Ensure that so-called joint military exercises will continue to be carried out in order to camouflage the continued presence and expansion of operations of US troops in the Philippines. Under Arroyo, US troops have been allowed to operate against the New People's Army in Bicol, Panay and Southern Mindanao provinces, as well as against armed Moro organizations in other areas of Mindanao, where they directly participate more and more in local military operations, including rendering combat intelligence and reconnaissance, aerial surveillance, tactical field military advice and even actual fighting.

Uphold the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) amid the widespread clamor for its abrogation, despite its non-mutuality and its clear one-sidedness as shown in the refusal of the US to yield custody of convicted rapist Lance Corporal Daniel Smith to Philippine authorities. In exchange, Arroyo expects to receive more military assistance from the US for the

counterrevolutionary war.

Step up the counterrevolutionary war in order to destroy or stop the growth of the revolutionary and anti-imperialist forces in the Philippines in accordance with the strategy outlined by US military advisers.

Support the hegemonist US foreign policy, particularly the new efforts of the Obama regime to "reboot" its assertion of "world leadership," including increased US troop deployment in Afghanistan and the continuation of the Bush-initiated war of terror.

Persist in opening up the Philippine economy to imperialist "globalization" and implementing the policies of liberalization, deregulation, privatization and denationalization. Under Arroyo, US imperialism can expect the Philippine government to continue following IMF-WB and World Trade Organization policies despite these being discredited and thoroughly exposed as worsening the permanent economic crisis in the country. Towards this end, the US can expect Arroyo and her cohorts to amend the Philippine constitution in order to remove provisions which protect national sovereignty and patrimony.

Continue to depress wages and people's incomes and suppress the toiling masses' rights in order to make the Philippines attractive to foreign investors.

In Arroyo's critical last year as puppet president, we expect the Filipino people to vigorously manifest their patriotism and intensify the struggle to defend Philippine sovereignty against its sellout by Arroyo. The Party calls on the Filipino people to heighten their resolve and struggle to fully attain national liberation and democracy and put an end to US intervention, economic and political subjugation, plunder and repression. **AB**



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Covering up the Arroyo couple's corruption

Numerous big-time corruption scandals involving Gloria and Mike Arroyo have been simultaneously exploding on the scene of late. Cases have long been filed with the Office of the Ombudsman, but its chair Merceditas Gutierrez has been sitting on them, evidently protecting her former classmate and close ally Mike Arroyo and his wife.

The most notorious of these cases concerned a bid-rigging scandal involving World Bank (WB) construction projects. Successive WB reports have disclosed details of the anomalies. Bert Hofman, WB country director for the Philippines revealed that it has been three years since the WB formally informed the Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and Office of the Ombudsman regarding the bid-rigging anomaly involving construction contracts for the \$33-million National Roads Improvement and Management Program 1 (NRIMP1). The DOF and DPWH merely passed their copies of these documents to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman in turn did nothing but suppress them.

Since 2006, four documents have already been submitted by the WB to concerned agencies of the Arroyo government. In November 2007, a nine-page "referral report" that summarized the anomalies was submitted to the office of Ombudsman Gutierrez. Just like the previous reports, Gutierrez kept these documents under wraps and refused to act on them.

Hofman eventually testified during the latest Senate hearing on February 24 about Gloria Arroyo's husband Mike's involvement in a cartel composed of contractors and a number of high-ranking government officials who collude to capture millions of dollars worth of WB projects and receive kickbacks from them.

The WB documents clearly exposed the existence of such a car-

tel headed by no less than Mike Arroyo. The cartel corners WB projects in the Philippines after going through the motions of a genuine bidding process. The WB interviewed almost 50 local and foreign contractors who were witness to such anomalies.

The most infamous among Mike Arroyo's accomplices were officials of E.C. de Luna Construction Corp., Cavite Ideal International Construction and Development Corp., CM Pancho Construction and four Chinese companies.

The WB report also implicated high-ranking officials of the Arroyo government, among them former DPWH secretary Florante Soriquez, DPWH Project Director Lope Adriano and Region IV-A Assistant Directors Huillio Belleza and "Tito" Miranda, Arroyo's minions in the Congressional and Senate Committee on Public Works, namely the late Sen. Robert Barbers and Reps. Prospero Pichay and Jacinto Paras.

Such gross inaction on the part of the Office of the Ombudsman has prompted former Senate President Jovito Salonga and 30 other personalities and organizations, including progressive parties Bayan Muna, Anakpawis and GABRIELA to file an impeachment complaint against Gutierrez in Congress last March 2. They argued that since Gutierrez assumed the leadership of the Office of the Ombudsman in

December 2005, she has never acted as a "people's defender" but as a "defender of the most powerful and corrupt in government." A number of senators have called on her to go on indefinite leave or resign to prevent her from influencing the course of the impeachment case.

The impeachment complaint against Gutierrez was filed in the face of the Ombudsman's utter inaction over a string of exposés involving Mike Arroyo's corruption. Among the other cases neglected by Gutierrez were the Mega Pacific election computerization scandal involving former Comelec Chairman Benjamin Abalos and the "Euro generals" controversy involving police generals arrested abroad for carrying undeclared cash in excess of the allowable limit. Gutierrez was likewise scored for her snail-paced action on a plunder case involving then Justice Secretary Hernani Perez and her subsequent decision to reduce it to a simple case of extortion.

Prior to this, in end-February, the Senate concluded its four-year old investigation of the ₱728-million "fertilizer scam". The Senate filed a case of plunder against former Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jocelyn "Jocjoc" Bolante, Mike Arroyo's bagman and



close friend; his accomplices in the department, namely Undersecretary Belinda Gonzales and former DA Assistant Secretary and now GSIS Vice President Ibarra Poliquit; and his other co-conspirators among the executives of Feshan Philippines, including its president and vice president Julie Gregorio and Rendontor Antolin and other employees and their operators Marilyn Araos, Marites Aytona and Jaime Paule based on its evaluation of the evidence gathered and

the sworn testimonies of witnesses.

The Senate declared that the acts of the accused were for all intents and purposes also the acts of Gloria Arroyo. There is strong suspicion that the "fertilizer scam" funds were diverted towards Arroyo's electoral campaign kitty in 2004.

The case is expected to suffer the same fate as the corruption cases involving the Arroyos that the Ombudsman has all but ignored. **AB**

Fiery protests against the VFA and Balikatan

Intense protests swamped the lopsided US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and Balikatan exercises between American troops and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) these past weeks. The most remarkable were the coordinated protest actions in the cities of Bicol where Balikatan is set to be launched in April.

Up to a hundred vehicles joined a caravan across Bicol from February 23 to 25 led by the region-wide Ban Balikatan or Bicolano Alliance for Nationalism Against Balikatan. The caravan culminated in a huge demonstration in Legazpi City that was joined by approximately 20,000 protesters. The protest's highlight was the burning of 25 US flags.

The protest action was a resounding success despite the repression, sabotage attempts, harassment and threats perpetrated by the military in the region.

Meanwhile, members of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) rallied in front of the US embassy on February 25. The police brutally dispersed the protesters, wounding a student who was hit by a riot policeman with his shield. Subsequent protest rallies which were also staged by the women's and youth sector at the US embassy on March 2 and 5, were also forcibly dispersed by the police.

The clamor to junk the VFA has the support of various sectors and personalities. Chief Justice Reynato Puno, in his dissenting opinion on the VFA observed that the VFA

leaves "our sovereignty in tatters," because the US does not consider the VFA enforceable within its domestic jurisdiction while the Philippine government considers it to be fully enforceable as a treaty. Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, for his part, said that it was "folly" for the Philippines to enforce a treaty that the US does not recognize as part of its domestic law.

On February 26, a motion for reconsideration was filed against the Supreme Court's earlier decision on the VFA. The petitioners included "Nicole" who was raped by an American soldier; former senators Jovito Salonga and Wigberto Tañada, BAYAN, Gabriela Women's Party and Bayan Muna, GABRIELA, and the Public Interest Law Center, through counsels Harry Roque Jr., Evalyn Ursua and Neri Colmenares.

Threats and repression. Human rights abuses in Bicol have escalated as a result of intensified "clearing" operations by the military and the police in preparation for the upcoming Balikatan exercises.

A sixteen-month old girl died from injuries she suffered when grenades fired from an M203 by

Philippine Army troops of the 901st Bde hit her family's house in Barangay Balanac in Ligao City, Albay on February 18, at around 11:30 a.m. Also injured were six children and their mothers. (*Please refer to the previous issue of Ang Bayan for details.*)

At the same time, residents have been complaining that their livelihoods have been disrupted due to the military's presence in their villages. Jeepney drivers have reported being harassed by the police asking for identification, upon the military's orders. Military operatives have also entered schools such as Aquinas University and Bicol University and have enforced a curfew in areas near AFP naval facilities which will be used by American troops.

From February 23 to 25, several checkpoints were set up in a number of towns in Camarines Sur and Sorsogon to block the protest caravan against the VFA and Balikatan. US troops were seen manning checkpoints in some areas.

In Magallanes, Sorsogon, elements of the 3rd and 7th Scout



Ranger Companies seized personal belongings, food and charcoal for cooking from demonstrators and threw them out in the streets. In Sorsogon City, 50 armed soldiers and policemen were deployed around Rizal Park where a program was staged by the protesters. In the evening, operatives of the Military Intelligence Battalion attempted to abduct Bayan Muna-Camarines Sur secretary general Jariz Vida.

The AFP also harassed drivers and residents of Guinobatan and Jovellar towns in Albay to prevent them from joining the protest action. Militarization along the coastal communities in Albay has also intensified. The army has been conducting mass meetings and trying to convince barangay captains to support the Balikaran exercises. Military forces have been stationed in Tabaco City and the barangays of Joroan, Bano and Nagas in the town of Tiwi.

Not a "humanitarian mission." Arriving aboard warships and F16 war planes, up to 6,000 American soldiers and 2,500 AFP soldiers are set to join the Balikatan exercises that are supposed to provide "humanitarian assistance" to people devastated by calamities. Many, however, believe that the Balikatan in Bicol is not merely a "humanitarian mission," but involves the direct participation of American troops in counter-insurgency operations against the revolutionary forces in the region.

Ban Balikatan spokesperson Prof. Jocelyn Bisuña believes that the American troops are coming to Bicol not just to play doctor and dentist. In fact, as early as mid-January, a US Navy officer had reportedly made the rounds of hospitals in Albay to survey experts and available facilities for orthopedic cases. Orthopedics is one of the common branches of medicine that

deals with combat-related injuries.

On January 29, a US unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) crashed along the boundary of Esperanza and Pio V. Corpuz towns in Masbate. UAVs

are used for aerial surveillance, usually for combat purposes.

American troops have also been conducting a census in the towns of Masbate. AB

AFP casualties mounting

Thirty-six military troops were killed and ten others were wounded in separate encounters between Red fighters of the New People's Army (NPA) and troops of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the past weeks. The people's guerrillas seized five M16 rifles and three shotguns.

March 3. Three elements of the 74th IB who were on patrol were wounded in an ambush by NPA Red fighters in Barangay Tagbacan Ilaya, Catanauan, Quezon.

March 1. Six soldiers of the 29th IB were killed, including their company commander 1Lt. Ricardo Naguiat while three others were wounded in a series of clashes between the military and Red fighters of NPA Front 6 in Sitio Tinopongan, Barangay Sta. Cruz, Quezon, Bukidnon. The guerrilla fighters seized four M16 rifles.

February 21. A soldier belonging to the 3rd Special Forces Battalion of the Philippine Army was killed and three others were wounded in an ambush conducted by Red fighters. The NPA detonated explosives at the truck carrying the soldiers in Sitio Malaga, Barangay Dalisay, Panabo City, Davao del Norte.

February 18. Red fighters of NPA Herminio Alfonso Command (HAC-NPA) seized an M16 rifle, three shotguns, a grenade and three rifle grenades in a raid against the armed fanatic group Bagani Warriors in Sitio Tagaytay, Barangay Mahungcog, Magpet, North Cotabato. Its leader, a former military sergeant, was also killed when he attempted to grab a rifle from the guerrillas who were talking to him.

According to HAC-NPA spokesperson Ka Isabel Santiago, the disarming operation was in response to complaints by the townsfolk against numerous abuses committed by the Bagani Warriors. This armed fanatic group was put up and supported by the AFP's Task Force Gantangan to sow terror among the Lumad and eliminate opposition to the landgrabbing activities of bureaucrat capitalists and foreign firms.

February 14-17. Eight soldiers of the 41st IB and 5th ID Recon Company were killed and two others were injured in an attack by units under the Agustin Begnalen Command of NPA-Abra in the small-scale mining areas of Lacub in the same province. The assault took place after the AFP-PNP intensified its operations following orders from Department of National Defense Sec. Gilberto Teodoro to secure the area for big mining companies.

January 31. Twenty troopers of the 53rd IB were killed in an ambush staged by the Red fighters of the NPA's Front Feliciano while the former were conducting military operations in Sitio Lakanapan, Barangay Gibo, Siayan, Zamboanga del Norte. Two Red fighters were martyred in the hour-long gunbattle. AB

An open letter to all CAFGU members

The following are excerpts from an open letter of Cordillera People's Democratic Front spokesperson Simon "Ka Filiw" Naogsan to all CAFGU elements, AFP troopers and junior officers and policemen.

Last January 22, Jose Wayangen, a CAFGU militiaman from Betwagan, Sadanga, Mountain Province shot dead Sgt. Pauig Pattaguan of the 77th IB in the Philippine Army detachment in Tocucan, Bontoc. The incident underscores yet again the inherent disunity in the fascist armed forces brought about by the chain of abuse, discrimination and corruption that goes from the highest command to the lowest-ranking soldier and militiaman in the field.

There is a limit to the levels of abuse and humiliation that even the lowliest militiaman will tolerate. Pattaguan ordered Wayangen to perform a menial chore, which the latter did. Afterwards, Pattaguan reprimanded Wayangen for performing the chore. Wayangen replied that he merely obeyed Pattaguan's exact orders, to which the sergeant responded with a sneering comment and twisted Wayangen's ear. Furious, Wayangen took his M14 rifle, pumped four bullets into Pattaguan, and called on his fellow militiamen to abandon the army detachment. Ten other militiamen, all villagemates of Wayangen, joined him and abandoned their posts.

The AFP treats CAFGU militiamen as second-class citizens, cannon fodder and errand boys. During combat operations, CAFGU are sent in advance as protective screen for operating Philippine Army troops, which shows how lowly they are regarded by the AFP. That, for a measly and often delayed monthly allowance. The salary of the lowest-ranking soldier is equivalent to the allowances of four CAFGU militiamen.

The killing of Sergeant Pattaguan is not an isolated incident. There are numerous cases of militiamen killing regular army troopers; of low-ranking troopers killing their own officers; of junior officers rising in mutiny against their gen-

erals and commander-in-chief. The fascist armed forces is rife with discontent fomented by a culture of violence, corruption, discrimination and greed. Officers discriminate against their men; troopers discriminate against militiamen; members of the majority discriminate against national minorities. It is Jose Wayangen's misfortune to

be a poor, uneducated, Igorot militiaman serving in an army that deems him. He responded in the manner that he was treated, violently. Some would call it justice.

The Cordillera People's Democratic Front calls upon all militiamen, troopers and junior officers of the fascist armed forces and the police to look into their situation and see how their lives are put at risk by their generals and commander-in-chief who benefit from corruption, profit from the largesse of jueteng, illegal drugs and other syndicated crimes. Are you willing to lay down your lives for those who treat you with such disdain?

True patriotism and service to the people means taking a stand against those who oppress and ex-

CAFGU kills 2 civilians in holdup

Two civilians were killed and one was seriously injured after a bloody holdup committed by CAFGU and military elements on a passenger jeep in Sitio Macaraoy, Barangay Boton, San Miguel, Catanduanes on February 12 at 4:00 a.m.

Killed were driver Perfecto Mendoza and passenger Salvacion Tatel. Another passenger, Salve Olapani-Tatel is in critical condition in a hospital.

In a statement, the Nerissa San Juan Command of NPA-Catanduanes identified the perpetrators as Gilbert Lucero Ebo, Ricky de Mesa, Janedy Brequillo Agulto and Vir Ian Ganje Lunas. Ebo, De Mesa and Brequillo are CAFGU elements stationed at Boton Detachment "E" company, 22INF (CAFGU) Battalion, Philippine Army. Lunas, the holdup gang's leader is a regular soldier. They were armed with M14 and M16 armalite rifles.

The holdup men ordered Mendoza to alight, shot him and robbed him of ₱20,000 in cash. The holdup men also stole cash and cellphones from the other passengers.

Tatel's bloodied and naked body was found along the shore of nearby Bato River, with her head bashed in with a rifle butt. Tropel, on the other hand, was raped and repeatedly stabbed. Her face was also repeatedly hit with a hard object.

At first, the military denied the involvement of CAFGU elements in the brutal holdup-slay. It was only later that Col. Ariel Bernardo, 901st Bde chief admitted to their involvement. He has never mentioned, however, that the gang was led by a regular soldier. **AB**

plait the majority of our fellow Filipinos. There are several options for you to join or support the armed revolutionary struggle for national democracy. First, militiamen, troopers and junior officers can defect with their weapons and join the New People's Army. Those who wish to remain in the AFP and PNP can join

the Lt. Crispin Tagamolila Movement, the clandestine revolutionary organization for members of the fascist armed forces. Second, refuse your orders, especially those that serve the ruling classes and are against the interests of the Filipino people. Third, quit the armed forces and revert to civilian life. AB

The struggle of the Tumanduk women

The Tumanduk tribe's struggle for land and livelihood and the particular struggle for women's liberation have come a long way. The Tumanduk tribe is the biggest and oldest tribe among the various indigenous groups in Panay, having been in existence even before the arrival of the Spanish colonialists. Its current population is estimated at 33,000—15,000 in Tapaz town, 6,000 in Jamindan (both in Capiz) and 12,000 in Calinog, Iloilo. Up to 33,310 hectares of its tribal lands in Tapaz and Jamindan currently form part of the Philippine Army 3rd Infantry Division's military camp.

Ever since the area was declared a military reservation, the AFP has been requiring villagers to pay "*tumado*" or land rent every harvest season. The residents have also borne the brunt of abuses perpetrated by the Philippine Constabulary (PC), Philippine Army (PA) and the Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF) now renamed the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). Those who failed to pay rent were physically abused and even killed, and their women brutally raped by the military.

The Tumanduk tribe began to unite and act in an organized manner after the arrival of the first units of the New People's Army (NPA) in Panay island in the latter part of 1971.

A number of Tumanduk women leaders recounted the unique role the tribal women have played, in an interview with *Ang Bayan*.

Tumanduk women before the coming of the revolutionary movement were "no different from the animals in the forest," said Nanay Ason, one of the women leaders. "We could neither read nor write." Their parents had no interest in sending them to school because after all, they would just be mar-

ried off, explained Ka Goyang, a guerrilla front cadre. Worse, the school was so far away from the village. Being mountain people, they also faced discrimination from the lowlanders.

"It was the revolutionary movement that educated me, taught me how to read and write. It was only the revolutionary movement that qualitatively changed our miserable condition," revealed Ka Goyang.

They used to be submissive to their husbands and parents, added Nanay Ason. "It was our parents who arranged our marriages. They received bride price from the families of their future sons-in-law." (Families have to pay more for a "*binukot*"¹ woman.)

We were forced to accept our husbands whether we liked them or not. We used to be so docile. When visitors arrived in the houses, we would rush to our rooms and shut the doors. Only men were allowed to entertain guests.

"It is part of the Tumanduk culture for married couples to contin-

ue living with their parents," added Ka Goyang. This made it very difficult for her to decide on becoming a full time NPA guerrilla.

"Since the NPA arrived, we were gradually enlightened," recalled Nanay Ason. "The comrades educated us of our rights. They told us that we, women, have rights because we, too, were human beings. The women increasingly realized their significant role in the community and that they had equal rights as men."

"The women's fortitude was tested during the martial law years. It was the women themselves who confronted the (Philippine) Army," narrated Nanay Ason. There were already clashes back then between the NPA, and



the PC and Army troops. Back then, there was a "commando unit" led by a Vietnam war veteran, a Sgt. Nick Roca, whose group was like a "death squad" composed of rebel returnees, criminal elements, rapists and men who cut off the heads of Tumanduk men.

As soon as there was news of an approaching enemy unit, the men would flee and go into hiding, leaving the women behind to brave the soldiers. "We would rather be raped than see our clansmen murdered," explained Nanay Ason.

Ka Goyang's grandfather was one of the military's victims of forced "*tumado*" during harvest

season. The rent would usually be in the form of several cavans of unhusked rice, with the quantity based on the number of seeds planted. Aside from the land-grabbing activities of the military, landlords from the plains would also seize Tumanduk lands and charge rent for the tribespeople's swidden farms.

After becoming politically conscious and organized by the NPA, the Tumanduk ceased paying rent to the military altogether, and mustered the strength to stand against the fascists despite threats to their lives.

Our economic conditions have become much better, added Ka Goyang. The Party and the NPA organized them into groups to improve their livelihood.

In the days of slash-and-burn agriculture, they would transfer from place to place. When the comrades arrived, they had very few crops. Their animals such as chickens, pigs and dogs all lived with them inside their tiny huts.

Now, they have much more expansive banana, coffee and peanut farms. Because of better production, their children have been able to go to elementary and high school, and some have even studied education and become teachers. A good number of adults can now read and write as a result of the revolutionary movement's literacy program.

The Tumanduk women now actively participate in peasant organizations. Some of them have been chosen leaders of mass organizations and local Party branches. A good number have joined the ranks of the NPA as Red fighters and eventually become Party cadres.

Recently, up to 80 Tumanduk martyrs, some having sacrificed their lives as far back as the martial law period were honored. Among them were Ismael Giganto (Ka Bob), Ka Randa (a *binukot* who became a squad leader and was martyred in 1987 in an encounter in Maayon, Capiz), and Elena Gardose, recognized by the Cultural Center of the Philippines as a singer of "*ambahan*," (a type of poem) and "*sugidanon*" or people's epic. When she died at the age of 110, the epitaph etched on Lola Elena's tombstone read "*Lupa ay dapat bawiin.*" [We must reclaim our land] **AB**

¹A "*binukot*" or "*well-kept maiden*" is a daughter chosen by her parents for special treatment so she could command a high price in marriage. As the term implies, she is kept in a dark room where she is brought food and other needs. She is not required to work and can only be exposed to sunlight on her wedding day. It is the "*binukot*" who usually memorize the tribe's epics.

NDFP consultant illegally arrested

Military and police forces illegally arrested a consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the peace talks. AFP troops have also relentlessly been torturing and summarily executing civilians falsely linked to the armed revolutionary movement.

March 3. Elements of the 42nd IB killed Domingo Barbado and seriously wounded William Arroyo, both fishermen when the soldiers indiscriminately fired on a group of 15 fisherfolk as they sailed the Lagonoy Gulf in the area of Barangay Adiangao, San Jose, Camarines Sur. To cover up their crime, the military claimed that they mistook the fishermen for guerrillas of the New People's Army (NPA) even though they were unarmed. Prior to this, on February 13, soldiers of the 42nd IB killed Eli Bracero, also a fisherman, off the shores of Lahuy Island, Caramoran because he was fishing in an area reserved for eco-tourism. Last January, Victor Panuelos, a civilian from Sta. Maria, Presentacion, Camarines, was also hit and killed by a stray bullet as soldiers of the 42nd IB fired upon Joseph Mendez, another civilian who was illegally arrested, tortured, robbed and falsely accused of being an NPA member. The intensified military terrorism of the 42nd IB in the area forms part of the clearing operations being conducted in preparation for the Balikatan exercises in April.

February 24. Elements of the ISAFP, PNP CIDG and 8th ID apprehended Eduardo Sarmiento in Alabang, Muntinlupa, Metro Manila. Sarmiento's arrest was illegal because he is a consultant of the NDFP in the peace talks and enjoys protection under the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees. The arresting team planted a grenade on Sarmiento's person to prevent him from immediately making bail. He is being implicated by the military in a trumped-up multiple murder case in connection to purges that allegedly took place in Inopacan, Leyte in 1985.

Before this, Sarmiento's staff Remegio Burac was also illegally arrested, tortured and linked to the same case in Inopacan, Leyte. Burac was seized aboard a bus in Lavezares, Northern Samar last January 27.

February 22. Two farmers killed by elements of the 29th IB in Barangay Lipa, Quezon, Bukidnon

were misrepresented as members of the NPA so that the military could avoid answering for their crimes. Emily Ratilla and Danilo Ginanat were caught in the crossfire during an encounter between the NPA and AFP. The barangay captain of Lipa and the mayor of Quezon have confirmed that they were ordinary civilians. In a related development, up to 75 families from the villages of Lipa, Sta. Cruz, and Kiburiao (all within the town of Quezon) were forced to evacuate and temporarily seek shelter in barangay halls and plazas in their barrios and sur-

rounding areas.

February 12. Elements of the 3rd Special Forces mauled two farmers from Paquibato District, Davao City. In an earlier incident last February 7, a resident also from the same area was wounded in a strafing incident by soldiers of the same military unit. Last January 29, three residents of Panialum and Paquibato, including a local church leader, were also beaten up by soldiers from that unit. Four members of the Paquibato District Peasant Alliance, who are residents of Barangay Mapula, Paquibato

were also mauled by soldiers last January 27.

February 3. Elements of the 53rd IB summarily executed Tony Antubo, 30, a farmer from Sitio Madagas Metsamaya, Barangay Gibo, Siayan, Zamboanga del Norte in retaliation for an ambush staged by the NPA-Front Feliciano on the said military unit. The military also illegally arrested his wife Desyl and Antubo's elder brother Ricky. The soldiers also took along Desyl's infant child. To conceal their crime, the AFP presented the three victims as members of the NPA. **AB**

Military kills Ka Parago's daughter

Henchmen of the US-Arroyo regime mercilessly killed the daughter of Leoncio Pitao, better known as Ka Parago, leader of the NPA Pulang Bagani Command of Southern Mindanao. The body of Rebelyn Pitao, 21, was found floating in a river in Carmen, Davao del Norte last March 5. Rebelyn was raped before she was killed. The family reported Rebelyn missing last March 4. According to witnesses, Rebelyn was aboard a tricycle with two male passengers, when it was suddenly blocked by a white van with license plate number LPG 588 in the vicinity of Sitio Bago Aplaya, Barangay Bago Gallera, Talomo District, Davao City, at around 6 p.m. The two male passengers pushed aside the tricycle driver and forced Rebelyn into the van. The driver immediately notified Rebelyn's mother of what happened.

Human rights defenders and progressive organizations condemned this heinous crime, saying that this criminal act is clearly part of the military's strategy against the New People's Army and all those who oppose the Arroyo regime.

NDFP peace panel chair Luis Jalandoni said that formal peace negotiations between the NDFP and the Arroyo regime have become untenable because aside from the Arroyo regime's violation of previously signed agreements and the continued imprisonment of NDFP consultants, Rebelyn's brutal slaying is a blatant violation of human rights and the CARHRIHL. He also held Gloria Arroyo and Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita accountable for this heinous crime.

Rebelyn had just passed the teacher's board exam and was recently accepted as a member of the teaching staff at St. Peter's College in the nearby district of Toril. **AB**

ST 72 harassed anew

Six activists recently freed from detention after the court dismissed trumped-up murder charges against them have been implicated in another concocted murder case. The new case involves the punishment by the New People's Army of two CAFGU elements last July 2008 in Rodriguez, Rizal.

Seventy-two legal activists from ST (dubbed the ST 72) were charged in the first murder case. All but one of them have been charged in the second murder case.

Because of the apparent harassment committed against them by the AFP and the Arroyo regime, Atty. Remigio Saladero, one of the ST 72, filed a petition for a writ of amparo. Attorney Saladero, chief counsel of the Kilusang Mayo Uno, was arrested in October 2008 at his home in Antipolo City and was detained for three and a half months in the provincial jail in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro. **AB**



Right of reply bill repressive of press freedom

Senate Bill 2150 or the “right of reply bill” represses freedom of the press. The bill compels the media to give “equal” air time or newspaper space to persons or institutions that have been the subject of negative reports. If there are many individuals targeted, each one needs to be given his or her own “equal time”. This means that the time or space allotted to such rejoinders will be much longer than the initial negative report. The media is also prohibited from editing such rejoinders.

Various media organizations have vehemently condemned this bill. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) describes it as an “act of terrorism against the media” because it tramples on the freedom of the press and media’s right to determine news content. The media said that following the principle of balanced news reporting, it has long been gathering and reporting views representing both sides of an issue.

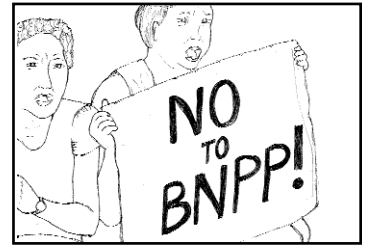
The NUJP said that the bill has a chilling effect and is repressive of the media. Failure to comply constitutes a crime and is heavily penalized through the payment of a hefty fine, imprisonment and the closure of media outfits.

If ever the bill becomes law, the media also warned that in the face of the upcoming elections, politicians with transgressions against the people may use the “right of reply” to evade negative reports, bombard the media with their own press releases and use it for their own publicity.

Intense criticisms have prompted many lawmakers to withdraw support for the bill sponsored by Sen. Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. in the Senate and Manila Rep. Bienvenido Abante, Jr. in Congress. AB

Various sectors oppose BNPP revival

Progressive organizations and scientists spearheaded a caravan from Quezon City to Balanga, Bataan in February 23 to dramatize their opposition to the plan to revive the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP).



According to Dr. Giovanni Tapang, spokesperson of the NO to BNPP Revival, “The BNPP is a not only a monument of folly but also of corruption during the dictatorship of President Marcos.... Now, a more corrupt and fraudulent Arroyo administration through its cronies and allies want to push the same folly.”

The No to BNPP Revival is a multisectoral alliance comprising church people, environmental activists, scientists, health professionals, farmers, fisherfolk and women’s groups.

The BNPP was built by the Marcos regime in the 1970s at a cost of \$2.3 billion and mothballed by the Corazon Aquino regime in 1986.

The rehabilitation of the BNPP will cost no less than \$800 million (P39.2 billion at an exchange rate of P49:\$1) and will take five years. The BNPP’s design is also outmoded and defective. Like other nuclear power plants constructed by Westinghouse in Brazil and South Korea, the BNPP constantly experiences power outages and radioactive water leaks. It is imperative for the Philippines to avoid the kind of accident that occurred at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine (formerly a part of the Soviet Union) in April 1986 that directly killed 47 workers and eventually killed more than 4,000 people in the vicinity who developed cancer due to exposure to radioactive fallout from the exploding nuclear reactor plant.

A study conducted by 50 nuclear experts during the time of President Aquino revealed that the nuclear power plant in Bataan had 40,000 defects. Even if the defects were repaired, there would be no guarantee that the installation will be safe.

The people will also be bearing the brunt of the costs of reviving the plant. Once approved, the ordinary consumer will immediately be charged P0.10/kilowatt hour for the next five years to pay for the rehabilitation of the plant.

Once the plant begins operating, consumers will again be charged P0.141/kwh for the next 30 years to fund the BNPP’s clean-up.

Thousands of Bataan residents attended a prayer rally organized by the Catholic church to oppose the BNPP’s revival. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines also expressed its vehement objection to the reopening of the plant, as did some bishops from the United Methodist Church.

Fisherfolk of Central Luzon under the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya also actively opposed plans to reopen the mothballed nuclear facility. AB

Women workers denounce DOLE inaction

Women workers vehemently denounced the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in Manila through a protest rally held by members of GABRIELA last March 3. The women workers of COATS Manila Bay, which produces sewing thread, also joined the protest action staged in front of the DOLE central office.

The women's groups said they are truly feeling the sting of the world financial crisis especially since management has reduced work days from six to only five days per week. Factories like Advan and SunFabric have also reduced working hours.

COATS workers said 300 workers have been laid off since last year. Since October 2008, the reported number of retrenched workers ranged from 39,000 to 40,191. Up to 19,000 lost their jobs in the first month of 2009.

Accenture-Philippines, an American company, warned of the possible layoff of 500 call center agents. **AB**