



EDITORIAL

Unite and help each other to end Duterte's tyranny

All democratic forces must consolidate their ranks and help each other in their democratic struggles against the Duterte regime. The need for unity is urgent in the face of the successive attacks of the tyrant against the people's interests.

On July 10, Duterte's rubber-stamp congress carried out his order to shut down ABS-CBN in a clear case of political vendetta against a media outfit that has allowed the airing of criticism against the regime. It is a grave attack on press freedom and a thinly-veiled threat against those in the media who cross the tyrant. It also paves the way for Duterte's favored oligarchs to make a bid of ownership of the broadcast company.

Earlier, Duterte signed his law on terrorism that is far worse than Marcos' 1972 martial law. He claimed the power to order the arrest of anyone without a judicial warrant and detain people for up to

24 days without filing charges and denying them the right to defend themselves. Duterte will convene Anti-Terror Council (ATC) which has the power to designate anyone as a "terrorist" or "terrorist-linked" or "terrorist-supporters" using the law's vague and overly broad definitions. The ATC is set to conjoin with the NTF-ELCAC to consolidate Duterte's military junta.

Just days after, state forces mounted attacks across the country. In Masbate, police and military forces massacred three peasants. Successive arrests and harassment were also carried out against activists and human rights workers. Mass demonstrations, even Catholic

masses, are being subjected to police surveillance, using pandemic lockdown restrictions as pretext.

With the law on state terrorism, Duterte is set on mounting even more attacks in the coming weeks and months. This shows his desperation to suppress the seething unrest and rising protests against his incompetent response to the Covid-19 pandemic, worsening corruption, devastation of the economy and complete disregard of the people's livelihood and well-being. Duterte is rushing to pursue his scheme of establishing a fascist dictatorship and securing his rule or that of his chosen successor beyond 2022.

The monster Duterte must be confronted and slain by the people's giant power of democracy and freedom. To grow in strength, the various sectors must act as one. They must support each others' democratic de-

mands. Only by doing so can they muster the strength and courage to stand up against the tyranny.

While calling for junking the terror law and bringing ABS-CBN back on air, they must also support the demand of nurses and health workers for protection, salary increases and mass testing to fight the pandemic; of jeepney drivers to get back on the road; and of workers for higher wages and safety at work. They must collectively assert for immediate and sufficient subsidy for millions who lost their jobs and whose livelihoods were lost due to the lockdown. They must join the demand of peasants and fisherfolk against destructive infrastructure projects, mining and other operations that will drive them away from their homes, land and fishing grounds; of the indigenous peoples and rural folk against military occupation of their communities, intimidation and the brutal campaigns of killings, abductions, aerial bombardment, artillery shelling and human rights abuses that characterize the regime's counterinsurgency; of

the children, youth and teachers to open classes safely; and of migrants for aid and safe return home.

Duterte is a rabid, but a sick and dying monster. He exploited the pandemic to claim extensive powers, accumulate wealth through corruption and use of public funds. He forced big business to their knees with threats to close or take over their property and operations. He placed the entire population under martial law control causing widespread misery and hardship. Tens of thousands were apprehended in the name of "public health." He murdered activists and imprisoned critics. He bought billions worth of jet fighters, attack helicopters, artillery systems and other war matériel, all while accumulating more than \$5 billion of foreign loans for his favored infrastructure projects to the detriment of the local economy and the people's livelihood.

However, each time Duterte strikes at the people, he only becomes more isolated from the people. Striking at press freedom by shutting down ABS-CBN roused the indignation of journalists and media work-

ers, as well as the entire people. When he signed the terror law, he enraged not only of the Filipino people, but also people and organizations around the world. More rage will be ignited by moves to push for charter change to allow 100% foreign ownership of enterprises and land, as well as to allow removal of term extension limits in order to pave the way for Duterte's stay beyond 2022.

A range of democratic forces are now arrayed against Duterte's tyrannical regime, from the patriotic and democratic organizations, alliances and movements; to the opposition forces in the conservative opposition, as well as Catholic Church, big business and those secretly within the government bureaucracy and in the AFP and PNP.

Street marches and large demonstrations must be mounted in the coming weeks and months to fend off the regime's terrorist attacks. The bigger and more frequent these demonstrations become, the higher probability that disgruntled military and police officers, as well as the international community, will openly withdraw support and push for a process of succession in line with the 1987 constitution.

All the revolutionary forces under the leadership of the Party are aligned with the Filipino people's aspiration to see an end to their sufferings under the tyrannical regime. While continuing to conduct public health and economic work among the peasant masses, the armed revolutionary forces under the New People's Army must mount tactical offensives to defend the people against the Duterte regime's terrorist attacks against the people.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the regime's overarching priority to establish its fascist dictatorship is putting whatever is left of the people's democratic rights and the people's health in great danger. There is broad consensus that the tyrant must be ousted from power as soon as possible. The Filipino people must firmly unite and rise up now!

AB



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NPA strikes at fascist soldiers and police in Negros, Palawan, Sorsogon

At least 14 soldiers and police of the US-Duterte regime were killed and 10 others were wounded in successive tactical offensives mounted by the New People's Army (NPA) from June 8-16.

In Negros Occidental, 12 elements of the 15th IB were killed in an ambush by the NPA-NPA-Southwest Negros (Armando Sumayang Jr. Command) in Barangay Pinggot, Ilog last July 8.

The 15th IB is notorious for conducting brutal SEMPO operations in Southern Negros. Its soldiers are involved in the spate of killings, harassment and forced surrender of civilians in the area.

Meanwhile, the NPA-South Central Negros disarmed a family of bandits at Sitio Binadlan, Barangay Bi-ao, Binalbagan on July 14. An M16 rifle, shotgun, .45 and .38 calibre pistols, ammunition and handheld radios were seized from the bandits. The bandits are involved in landgrabbing, human rights violations and anti-social activities in the area since 1990.

The NPA-Palawan also mounted successive am-

bushes in Taytay, Palawan on July 12 and 13. Red fighters fired at a mobile of the Philippine National Police (PNP) along the highway at Sitio Ibangley, Barangay Abongan on July 12. The PNP chief of Dumaranan town and another police were aboard the said vehicle.

On the next day, the people's army ambushed soldiers of the MBLT 3 who were deployed in the same area to respond to the ambush. A soldier was killed while three others were wounded.

In Sorsogon, the military and police sustained four casualties in a series of harassment operations mounted by the NPA in two days. The casualties were part of military units deployed to conduct "Community Support Program" in five towns of the province.

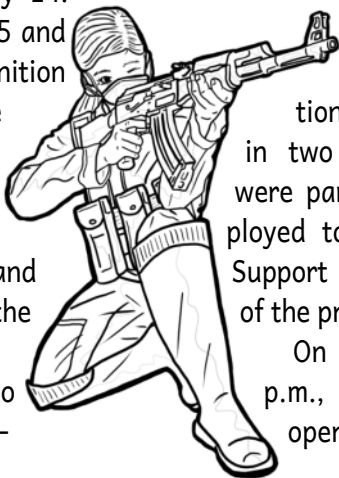
On July 14, at around 6 p.m., Red fighters fired at operating soldiers of the

91st CMO Company in Barangay Calpi, Bulan. A soldier was killed while another was wounded. In the same evening, the NPA also harassed soldiers operating in the adjacent barangay of Calmayon in Juban.

On July 16, two elements of the PNP 9th Special Action Battalion were wounded in an NPA harassment operation in Barangay Tula-tula Sur, Magallanes.

Earlier, during the first week of July, the PNP-Masbate paralyzed the plunderous operations of Matibay Cement Factory in Barangay Casabangan, Pio V. Corpuz. Red fighters destroyed its mining equipment.

The said cement-manufacturing company will endanger the lives and livelihoods of residents in 11 barangays in the towns of Pio V. Corpuz and Esperanza. Hundreds of hectares of farmlands and residential areas are set to be covered by its lime mining operations in the area. A coal-fired power plant is also set to be constructed in and pollute the area to enable the company to be fully operational. AB



Justice Carpio: CPP, NPA cannot be declared terrorists under ATA

A former official of the Supreme Court asserted that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) cannot be declared terrorists under the new Anti-Terror Act (ATA).

Former Associate Justice Antonio Carpio shared this view in reaction to Duterte's declaration that "the CPP is terrorist because I declare it to be" and the clarification of Sen. Panfilo Lacson that only the courts can formally proscribe as terrorist any organization. Carpio said both Duterte and Lacson are wrong because the CPP and NPA are "rebels" and not terrorists.

Carpio pointed out that under the ATA, "under the ATA rebels are not terrorists and cannot be de-

clared as terrorists." He pointed out that rebellion is not considered a "predicate crime" by the ATA. This is different from the Human Security Act (HSA) of 2007 which states rebellion is absorbed under terrorism. The ATA replaced the HSA.

Carpio added that the intent of rebellion "is to remove any territory or military force of the Philippines from allegiance to the Government or its laws" is different from ATA's definition of terrorism. "CPP-NPA rebels, whose intent is clearly rebel-

lion, are not terrorists under the ATA, and consequently they, individually or as a group, cannot be proscribed as terrorists under the ATA."

It is thus clear that the ATA was passed to suppress the forces and activists openly defying the regime. It is just that they question the law before the courts, especially since it violates their rights under the country's laws.

Contrary to what the regime's officials claim, the Party and people's army are not listed as terrorist by United Nations Security Council, Australia, United Kingdom or Canada. AB

ABS-CBN closure, an attack on free press


With a vote of 70-11, the Congress finally decided to kill the franchise bid of ABS-CBN, the biggest radio and television broadcast network in the country. Thirteen hearings were held to deal with various issues hurled by Duterte's minions in congress against the network. Among the issues discussed were the network's alleged tax evasion schemes, and the citizenship of former ABS-CBN chairman Eugenio Lopez III. The congressmen also dealt on issues regarding the content of TV shows, matters that are beyond the scope of Congress.

In addition to its Quezon City station, ABS-CBN operates 46 local stations across the country that broadcast for free. It also has 12 free digital channels, as well as 10 cable and four satellite paid channels. It also operates DZMM and three other AM radio stations, as well as 17 MOR (My Only Radio) FM stations and 16 more in the provinces. These were closed down, excluding paid cable and satellite channels that are not covered by the franchise. The Lopezes disclosed that the company has been losing about ₱30-35 million per day since their broadcast was put off-air.

Congressmen deny that Rodrigo Duterte was behind the closure order. However, on July 13, Duterte himself boasted that he has succeeded in dismantling the oligarchy by shutting down ABS-CBN. Since he sat in power, he has repeatedly threatened to close the network which he accused of bias and favoring his rivals during the 2016 elections. He was further enraged with the network for covering his regime's bloody "war on drugs." He ordered the closure of the company amid the pandemic and lockdown, and at a time when only a few stations are capable of providing free television broadcast services across the country.

The franchise application process has long weaponized against free press by the ruling clique as the approval of franchise bids are mainly dependent on the whims of the president and congressmen. In fact, this process is often enmeshed in dirty politics as the authority to grant franchises is monopolized by those in power. Republic Act 3846 states that

broadcast companies are required to obtain a legislative franchise to operate. These franchise bids have to pass through the bureaucratic eye of the needle of Congress, and then go to the president for signing in the form of a new law. Although applications go through hearings and discussions, the approval is mainly dependent on who is in power. This is in contrast to countries where the said authority is given to independent commissions. The franchise system is also being used as a milking cow by bureaucrat capitalists.

This system undermines the right of the media to free press. Similar to how it was used against ABS-CBN, this may also be used to silence other media networks to prevent them from exposing government abuses and incompetence. In new franchises issued by the Duterte regime to broadcasting companies such as those granted to GMA and The 5 Network, a provision was inserted obliging them to allocate 10% of their paid commercials for government-use. This is being used by the ruling clique to freely broadcast their advertisements and programs which feature the regime's officials. There is also a provision which grants the president a special right to take over media stations, and to broadcast and operate their facilities "in times of war, rebellion, public peril, calamity, emergency, disaster or serious disturbance of peace and order." 

#LabanKapamilya: Protest of ABS-CBN employees and supporters

EVERY EVENING, SINCE July 10, employees and artists of ABS-CBN have been converging in front of its Quezon City station to conduct a noise barrage to protest the decision of Congress to deny the network's bid for franchise renewal.

On July 18, ABS-CBN supporters held a caravan from Makati and converged in front of the station in Quezon City. Similar protest actions were organized by employees and supporters in the cities of Cebu, Olongapo, Bacolod, Tacloban, Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga.

Lawmakers from the Makabayan Bloc, who authored one of the ABS-CBN franchise bills, participated in the protest actions. Members of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Altermidya, Photojournalists' Center of the Philippines Inc., Kilusang Mayo Uno, Alliance of Concerned Transport Organizations and other sectoral groups that advocate press freedom joined the mobilizations. More than 500 journalists from various media organizations also expressed their support for the protest.

Approximately 11,000 workers are set to lose their jobs or receive lower salaries. The company already closed down their regional stations in various provinces, as well as its stations which provide free television and radio broadcast services. Aside from regular employees, workers who are outsourced by ABS-CBN from third-party manpower agencies are also set to lose their jobs, as well as small entrepreneurs who operate their businesses around the station in Quezon City. Today, ABS-CBN is only allowed to air its programs in the internet and through cable channels.

Squeezing overburdened Filipinos further:

Neoliberal agenda in SONA 2020

In his upcoming State of the Nation Address (SONA) this July 27, expect Rodrigo Duterte to once again aggressively push for the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms to further squeeze the already overburdened Filipinos. As what happened with the Anti-Terror Law, these schemes will surely be railroaded by his majority as Congress resumes its sessions.

The measures are being pushed by Duterte’s World Bank-trained technocrats under the guise of boosting the economy which has seen a sharp downturn due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These are focused on “attracting foreign investments,” borrowing money, and passing the burden on the people in the form of new taxes.

Duterte’s economic managers have set on a media campaign this month to aggressively push for the implementation of an utterly regressive “Junk Food Tax” which aims to levy additional excise taxes

on almost all food products. These include dried fish, noodles and canned goods that are staple to many poor households. Excise tax will also be levied on deep-fried and salty snacks; candies, sugary desserts and sweetened beverages; and fastfood products. The fiscal reform is justified as “sin tax” purportedly to discourage Filipinos from eating unhealthy food. Filipinos will be set back by at least P72.97 billion in should the tax be implemented. The tax burden is heavier for the poor majority who pay proportionally more out of their

already meager incomes. This is doubly reprehensible especially now that majority of workers have lost their jobs to the pandemic.

Duterte’s economic managers are busy finding other things to tax for debt servicing. The Department of Trade and Industry recently compelled small online sellers to register their businesses in order to impose taxes on them under pain of facing criminal charges. Afterwards, it stated that barter trading is illegal and must be taxed. New barter arrangements such as “online barter trading” have emerged as these have provided people with an alternative source of food and other basic needs amid the pandemic and imposition of work restrictions.

Last July 9, Malacañang announced that Congress and Duterte’s economic officials have already agreed on which programs to prioritize under the so-called Bayanihan 2. The package primarily aims to lower corporate income tax, railroad the regime’s infrastructure projects, and extend Duterte’s emergency powers. (*Read related article in Ang Bayan, May 21.*)

Simultaneously, Duterte’s henchmen are aggressively pushing to expedite the privatization of government properties to purportedly augment public funds amid the Covid-19 crisis. Senator Francis Tolentino recently filed the “Covid-19 Economic Lifeline Act” which aims to create a Covid-19 Privatization Commission. The said commission will oversee the disposition of state-owned assets. Earlier in April, Duterte himself expressed his intent to sell the land where the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the Philippine International Convention Center stand on. The said area has long been targeted by big bouregois compradors who are seeking to expand their reclamation activities in the Manila Bay.

Nurses protest for PPE, wage increase

Nurses of the San Lazaro Hospital in Manila City mounted a silent protest last July 16 to demand better treatment. The nurses disclosed that around 60 health workers in the hospital were infected with Covid-19. Among them are 48 patients who compose 60% of the facilities Covid-19 patients.

They lamented that the infections were primarily caused by the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the wrong type of face masks that were given them. They also criticized the slow disbursement of funds for a wage increase, as well as the absence of hazard pay and other benefits.

As of June 30, the Department of Health has distributed only 2 million despite being appropriated a budget for the procurement of 10 million PPE. So far, the agency has been able to procure and distribute only less than half of much-needed medical equipment. Recent reports revealed that majority of Covid-19 wards have already reached full capacity and could no longer accept critical patients.

The Filipino Nurses United bared that nurses are overworked yet underpaid and left unprotected from Covid-19. On July 18, the Department of Budget and Management issued a circular to implement the increase in salary grade of nurses as stipulated in the Philippine Nursing Act. This entitles entry-level nurses in public hospitals to a salary of ₱32,000-₱34,000 from ₱22,000-₱24,000 previously. The said law was enacted in 2002, or 18 years ago, but is only set to take effect today.

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Behind SMC's humanitarian facade

The San Miguel Corporation has been boasting of its huge contributions to the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. Behind its humanitarian facade, however, is its oppressive treatment to people to further squeeze profits through their misery. While its president Ramon Ang is busy with its donation drives, other personnel are also busy evicting thousands of urban poor residents, peasants and fisherfolk.

Amid the pandemic, SMC threatened to demolish the houses of nearly 3,000 residents of Castañas, Guisguis San Roque, Guisguis Talon, and Talaan Aplaya in Sariaya, Quezon to pave way for its coal-fired power plant project in the area. Residents from Sitio Tayawak, Barangay Castañas have been evicted on July 6. In 2018, the local government approved the project after the SMC bribed provincial board members. In addition to the power plant, the company plans to put up a cement plant, a brewery and a port in Sariaya.

Prior to this, the company evicted 400 families from their communities in Taliptip, Bulakan, Bulacan, to pave way for Aerotropolis, an infrastructure program approved by Duterte. The fisherfolk, whom the company made to appear to have voluntarily left, were in fact threatened to be evicted without

compensation.

The Bulacan local government and the 48th IB assisted in evicting the residents. The Aerotropolis is set to destroy the livelihood of 1,000 fisherfolk and 2,500 hectares of mangroves crucial to Manila Bay's ecosystem.

The Aerotropolis is an unsolicited project proposal which replaced the planned rehabilitation project of the current international airport in Metro Manila.

Ang is one of Duterte's most favored oligarchs. Duterte considers him as his "close friend" especially after SMC donated funds for his suppression campaigns. His donations include the P2-billion funds for drug rehabilitation centers under the "war against drugs," the P330 million donation to families of soliders who were either killed or wounded when they besieged Marawi City, and another P2.52 billion for the "rehabilitation" of Marawi and parts of Davao devastated by the AFP's bloody counter-insurgency campaign.

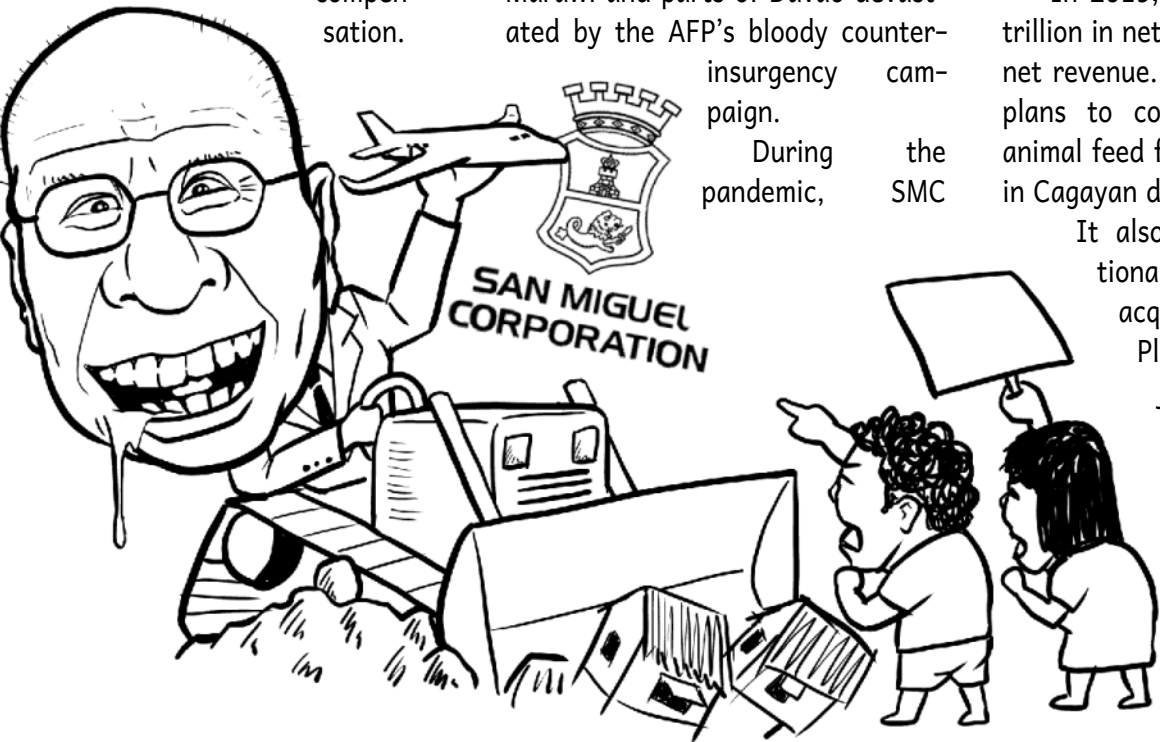
During the pandemic, SMC

boasted that it has contributed aid worth P13 billion to various indigent sectors. It counted as "aid" the P3-billion compensation it gave to its own workers, and the funds it spent in constructing a private testing center which it uses to test its employees. The entire P13 billion is tax-deductible, in accordance to Duterte's order to deduct all donations, in the form of funds, material or services, that have anything to do with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In exchange, the regime awarded the company the most contracts under its Build, Build, Build program. In addition to the Aerotropolis, it awarded to SMC several construction projects including the Skyway 3, Skyway Extension, Skyway 4, MRT-7 and TPLEX. The MRT-7, previously awarded to the Ayalas, have dislocated 300 families and has resulted in a spate of extrajudicial killings of peasant leaders. It is set to evict 40,000 more residents in Caloocan City. The said projects are behind Duterte's earlier efforts to lift economic restrictions in the construction sub-sector, prior to opening other industries under the lockdown.

In 2019, SMC registered P1.02 trillion in net sales and P48.6 billion net revenue. Amid the pandemic, it plans to construct 12 additional animal feed factories and breweries in Cagayan de Oro City and Laguna.

It also plans to build additional facilities in its newly-acquired Masinloc Power Plant in Zambales. Majority of the company is owned by the family of Eduardo Cojuangco, one of the biggest cronies of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.



Police massacre 3 barangay watchmen in Masbate

Three barangay watchmen were abducted by police and soldiers on July 4 at midnight and were massacred in the boundary of barangays Bagacay and Marintoc in Mobo, Masbate. The victims, identified as Edgar Mingoy, Marlon Bajar and Rolly de la Cruz, were all falsely presented before the media as members of the New People's Army (NPA).

The suspects include troops of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 5, 9th Special Action Battalion, Regional Intelligence Unit, Masbate Provincial Mobile Force Company and the Mobo Municipal Police Office. Elements of the 96th Military Intelligence Company were also involved in the crime.

The perpetrators repeatedly fired their guns in the air for an hour to make it appear that they encountered an NPA unit.

Mingoy served as a barangay watchman for 20 years, while Dela Cruz also served as a councilor in their village.

Bombing. Using two FA-50 fighter jets, the military dropped eight bombs near two Lumad communities in Barangay Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur on July 15 at

around 2 a.m. Two drones were also seen flying overhead. The incident traumatized residents especially children. Thirty-seven families evacuated from their communities after the incident.

Arrests. State elements arrested activist Jenelyn Nagrampa-Caballero in Barangay San Isidro, Nabua, Camarines Sur on July 7. Nagrampa is the chairperson of the Bicolana-Gabriela and concurrently serves as the national vice chairperson of Gabriela.

On July 9, state elements also arrested Rev. Dan San Andres, 61 years old, of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in Sipocot town in the same province. San Andres is the spokesperson of Karapatan-Bikol.

Both veteran activists were

slapped with a trumped-up charges of murder for purportedly killing two soldiers in 2018.

Activists protested in Legazpi and Naga City on July 10 to condemn the arrests.

Militarization. At least five military units have been besieging the towns of Juban, Magallanes, Bulan, Irosin and Matnog in Sorsogon since the last week of June. In Irosin, 23 out of its 28 barangays are currently being occupied by soldiers under the guise of conducting "Community Support Program." The 22nd IB has also began constructing its camp in Barangay Calomagon in Bulan.

The fascists are conducting house-to-house searches and listing the names of residents. They also coerced barangay councils to stage the surrender of their constituents.

Last July 7 and 8, soldiers and police ransacked the houses of eight residents in Barangay Maalo and Calmayon in the town of Juban. AB

Police house-to-house search is unlawful

THE ORDER OF Sec. Eduardo Año of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to the Philippine National Police (PNP) to do "house-to-house" to search and "apprehend" and bring Covid-19 positive individuals to quarantine facilities is another militarist measure.

Año's new order will further trample on civil rights. This goes against even the reactionary laws which require police to have a warrant to enter and search private homes. It also violates privacy rights which are upheld even during medical situations. Earlier, Año order local government officials to arrest "quarantine violators" to teach them a lesson. Almost 900 were arrested and fined on July 9 in Quezon City. On July 16, at least 300 were apprehended in Navotas.

Opposition to Terror Law broadens

THE MOVEMENT AGAINST Tyranny and Concerned Lawyers for Civil Liberties protested in front of the Commission on Human Rights in Quezon City last July 11 to oppose the Anti-Terror Act.

The said groups are among those that filed the 10th petition at the Supreme Court demanding to junk the law.

On July 16, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued a pastoral letter expressing its "alarm" on the provisions of the law which allows warrantless arrests and detention. It noted that a number of Catholic priests and bishops are being accused of being "communists," and thus "terrorists, for their advocacies.

Meanwhile, 45 US congressmen demanded the immediate junking of the law. They said that this will only be used by Duterte to further suppress the rights of ordinary Filipinos. The lawmakers submitted their letter to the Philippine Embassy on July 16.

Surveillance amid the pandemic

In July 8, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Emerging Infectious Diseases allowed the opening of barbershops, parlors and salons up to 50% of their regular clientele in Metro Manila. Among the AITF's requisites is for all costumers to use contact tracing applications like the StaySafe.Ph.



StaySafe.Ph is a phone application which registers the location wherever the user may be. The objective of this app is supposedly to provide fast and easy information to individuals if they come in contact with a Covid-19-positive individual by registering phone numbers to establishments they patronize.

The app was developed and is being ran by MultiSys Technology Corp. It was endorsed by Hermogenes Esperon of the National Security Council (NSC) and officialized by the IATF generals last April 22. The company aims to enrol half of the Philippine population. It has access to all active cellphones and can directly send messages to all through the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

Multisys Technologies Corp. was founded by David Almirol Jr. who previously worked in a US military base in Iraq. He met Esperon

in 2016 and served as a consultant to the NSC in 2017. He worked on some "technical surveillance" projects for the agency. The StaySafe.Ph was said to be commissioned by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency. PLDT holds 45% of the company since 2018.

Many technology experts have sounded alarm against StaySafe.Ph, claiming that the application could be used to spy on the people and violate their right to privacy. It collects extensive data from registered cellphones. Aside from determining the user's location, it has permission to read and change messages and contacts, access the camera and microphone, read storage and change phone settings, among others.

The app has no declared privacy statement and it is unclear how the collected data will be used after the pandemic. It can be used by those in power during the next election.

Data can be sold to interested businesses.

Critics and the political opposition fear that it will be used against them, especially under the newly-signed Anti-Terror Law. The National Investigation Bureau, which has persecuted Duterte's critics in the guise of stopping the proliferation of fake news, will have access to the app's data.

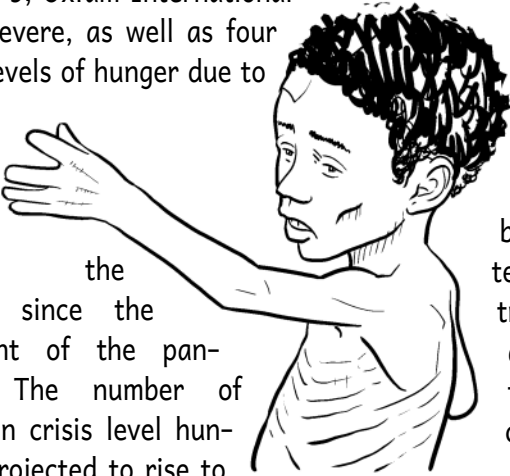
On June 29, the Makabayan bloc proposed that Congress investigate irregularities and privacy issues of the app. Its representatives cited the complaint lodged by then DICT official Eliseo Rio Jr. who said that the app is incapable of contact tracing. At the time it was endorsed by the IATF, the app was only capable of collecting phone numbers and determining locations. It is not integrated with the databases of the Department of Health and local agencies which are directly in charge of contact tracing. **AB**

Covid-19 pandemic aggravates global hunger

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to aggravate hunger in countries where food crisis is most severe and is creating new epicenters of hunger across the globe. In a report published last July 9, Oxfam International identified 10 countries where hunger is most severe, as well as four countries which are experiencing rapidly rising levels of hunger due to the pandemic. Oxfam is a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focused on the alleviation of global poverty.

Using data from the World Food Programme, Oxfam projected that 12,000 people per day could die from hunger. This figure is higher than the 10,000 Covid-19 deaths per day recorded in April which is

already the highest since the onslaught of the pandemic. The number of people in crisis level hunger is projected to rise to



270 million before the end of the year, an 82% increase from 149 million in 2019.

It noted that among the factors behind this is the disruption in the production of small-scale farmers who are at the backbone of local food systems in many poor countries. Farmers are adversely affected by lockdowns as they are restricted to access their land to cultivate,

"Covid-19...", continued on page 9

plant or harvest crops. Travel restrictions impede access to markets to sell their produce or buy seeds and tools. The disruption in local production has resulted in inflation in many countries.

Additionally, the shutdown of economies resulted in massive job losses in the past months. Latest statistics by the International Labor Organization indicate that 305 million full time jobs have been lost across the world because of the pandemic. The figure still excludes workers in the informal sector. Oxfam said that millions of people could no longer afford to eat after losing their jobs and lack of subsidy from their respective governments. It disclosed that hunger and food crisis is worst in Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Afghanistan, Venezuela, West African Sahel, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria and Haiti. Hunger levels are also rising in poor countries including India, South Africa and Brazil.

Amid rising levels of hunger, the eight biggest food and beverage manufacturing multinationals continue to rake in superprofits and paid out over \$18 billion to their shareholders since January this year. These companies include Coca-Cola which paid out dividends worth \$3.5 billion, Danone (\$1.35 billion), General Mills (\$594 million), Kellogg (\$391 million), Mondelez (\$408 million), Nestlé (\$8.2 billion for the entire year), PepsiCo (\$2.7 billion) at Unilever (around \$1.2 billion). The total amount is ten times bigger than the funding requested by the United Nations to feed the most vulnerable peoples across the world. AB

Pediatricians recommendation:

Open schools safely

The 67,000-strong American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended last June for schools to be opened and for students to be present in schools the soonest possible time. They came up with eight principles in considering school re-entry policies in its paper entitled "COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry," last updated on June 25. It emphasized that all policy considerations "should start with the goal of having students physically present in school."

The pediatricians assert that schools do not just provide academic learning to children and adolescents. These also serve as a venue for students to develop their social and emotional skills, and to exercise and get access to mental health support, among many others that cannot be provided by online learning. But according to them, schools should also be ready to adapt and decisions should be flexible and nimble.

There has been many researches on the surprising aspect of the pandemic wherein children appear to be infected "far less frequently than adults and, when infected, typically have mild symptoms." Children are also "less likely to spread the infection," particularly those under 12 (10 in some researches.) When children are infected, it is most frequent that they contract the virus from adults.

The UK's 2,500-strong Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health made the same appeal to the UK government, stating that keeping schools shut "risks scarring the life chances of a generation of young people."

Most pediatricians do not discount that outbreaks in schools can happen, and are even inevitable, but the benefits of opening them outweigh the risks. They reiterated that: "Every child deserves to have an uninterrupted education."

Due to the pan-

demic, 1.3 billion children worldwide have been forced to stop school since March-April. According to the UNICEF, the perils for children being out of school grow and will continue to grow if schools remain shut, especially in backward countries. Children who have stopped school are in danger of never coming back. This will result in greater inequalities, weaker health systems, violence, child labor exploitation and child marriages.

The decision on when and how to open schools is not easy, says the agency. It will need large infusion of funds and close supervision, as past weaknesses of the system should be addressed before schools can be opened. Governments should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of opening schools as against online learning. Beside health facilities, governments need to coordinate closely with teachers and parents. Funds are also needed for those children who lag behind and those with special needs. AB

