

EDITORIAL

Further strengthen mass struggles against the US-Marcos regime

The last months of 2023 has been marked by the further intensification of the crisis of the semicolonial and semifeudal ruling system under the oppressive, puppet and fascist US-Marcos regime. Price increases, economic slowdown, worsening corruption, and rise in government debt has continued unabated.

As a result of the burdensome policies of the Marcos regime, the Filipino masses are faced with deteriorating living standards, worsening unemployment, economic dispossession, lack of income, low wages, hardship and hunger.

On the other hand, various sectors have responded with persevering struggle and protests against

the onerous and oppressive US-Marcos regime. In recent weeks, successive transport strikes and protest actions have been mounted across the country against the imminent measures that would take away the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of jeepney drivers and operators. In addition, various democratic sectors such as workers,

peasants, fisherfolk, teachers, health workers, student youth and others continue to fight for their economic and political demands.

The steady growth of these struggles are bound to accelerate in the coming months next year, as the deterioration of the crisis-ridden system is set to accelerate under the US-Marcos regime. In addition to economic and socioeconomic issues, a slew of political issues, such as the construction of new US military bases, charter change, human rights violations, and others are stirring increasingly frequent and



bigger street protest actions, people's assemblies and expansion of people's organized ranks.

In the next year, national-democratic forces should exert all-out effort and be more daring in mass work to reach greater numbers and more effectively lead their struggles. This work should be done systematically and indefatigably. Hundreds of teams should be put up to do propaganda and organizing work. Train and raise their capacity to improve methods of leadership of the masses. They should carry out political discussions and activities on a daily basis to raise their knowledge and awareness and to sharpen their minds for analysis. A plan should be forged to ensure the the number of people reached increases every passing week and month in workplaces, communities, schools, offices and other places of concentrations.

National-democratic forces should conduct widespread campaigns of social investigation and class analysis in different areas and sectors. At various levels, data and information should be systematically assembled to identify the specific conditions and problems facing the masses within the framework of the

semicolonial and semifeudal system. Data should be analyzed from the proletarian class perspective to expose the oppression and exploitation of the masses. The task is to link these to the issues besetting the entire people and to expose the lies of the ruling regime. We must identify the calls that will rouse the masses and the methods to organize and mobilize them for the national-democratic movement.

Advance all-out a widespread propaganda-education movement among the masses that will fully expose the anti-poor and subservient US-Marcos regime. Raise the masses' consciousness and rouse their militance and courage to collectively struggle for their democratic rights and interests under the reactionary law without being limited by it. The US-Marcos regime and the reactionary state must be fully exposed as political representatives of the entire ruling class that serve the interests of the ruling bourgeois compradors and big landlords, and foreign banks and companies.


Raise the ability of national-democratic forces to quickly release statements that analyze issues to help guide the masses in their analysis and action. Turn the cities

and countryside red with the patriotic and democratic clamor of the people. Aim for saturation of sweeping and solid propaganda forms that directly reach the masses. Mount assemblies and lightning cultural performances in factories, schools, churches, markets, terminals, and communities for mass discussions or joint viewing of progressive movies, documentaries or news reports. Carry these out not only to have the masses watch or listen, but to give them the opportunity to air their grievances, express their views and show solidarity.

Overcome all factors that weaken or prevent the democratic mass movement from advancing. Identify, root out and repudiate all the factors that weigh down on the masses, including all forms of doubt, hesitation or fear among the masses and organized forces. All these will be overcome by waging and leading mass struggles. There are many new tasks that need to be fulfilled, thus, many new forces need to be trained. From the crucible of mass struggles in the coming months will emerge new ranks of national-democratic forces from among the masses, which will raise the vigor and courage of the masses in the cities and countryside.

Trust new forces especially among the younger generations: dare to give them responsibility, guide them, assess and sum-up their experience for them to grow rapidly and shoulder ever greater tasks. At the same time, train new cadres who will lead in different fields of work, and comprehensively train them ideologically, politically and organizationally.

The Party and the revolutionary forces should strengthen its leadership as we persevere in strengthening the revolutionary mass movement both in the cities and countryside. This is a corollary task to the main task of leading the New People's Army and promoting the revolutionary armed struggle in the countryside.




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 ang.bayan@cpp.ph

Talks should be held for just and lasting peace, not surrender

There is no room in the peace talks for discussing, or insinuations, let alone demands, for the surrender of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) or of the armed revolutionary struggle in the Philippines. This is the statement of Comrade Luis G. Jalandoni, NDFP Negotiating Panel Senior Adviser, in response to a series of statements from officials of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) calling the peace talks as discussions for "surrender."

The Oslo Joint Statement was signed on November 23 in Norway declaring the intention of the GRP and the NDFP to reopen peace talks.

Comrade Juliet de Lima, interim chairperson of the NDFP Negotiating Panel, particularly criticized Department of Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. for claiming that the NDFP surrender is the GRP's basis for agreeing to reopen negotiations. She reminded Teodoro that it was the GRP which approached the NDFP and not the other way around.

According to Ka Luis and Ka Julie, "peace talks are not negotiations for capitulation." They emphasize that the negotiation is a unique opportunity to seek a mutually acceptable and principled approach to fully address the real causes of the armed conflict.

They said the GRP should just focus on the significant agenda of the negotiations stipulated in the Hague Joint Declaration. This means discussing the draft of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER) which explains the socio-economic roots of the civil war.

Support for NDFP

Behind the NDFP negotiating panel are its allied organizations in asserting the basic and urgent demands of the people for land reform and national industrialization and other ini-

tiatives for social justice and national sovereignty. They represent the national and democratic interests of their respective sectors.

In connection with the signed Oslo Joint Statement, statements of support were released by the national leadership of the Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (Makibaka), Liga ng Agham para sa Bayan (LAB), Katipunan ng mga Gurong Makabayan (Kaguma), Lupon ng Manananggol para sa Bayan (Lumaban), Christians for National Liberation (CNL), as well as the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.

Regional and provincial branches of the NDFP nationwide also warmly welcomed the joint statement. Revolutionary organizations are now studying and reviewing the writings and statements of Comrade Jose Maria Sison, the NDFP and the Party related to the peace talks in order to unite and gather the support of the wider Filipino masses.

What should be discussed?

The widespread landlessness of peasant masses in the countryside should be discussed. Because people's war is a peasant war, genuine land reform is a key response. The Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM) unites peasants to advance this struggle.

Peasants gained nothing from the reactionary state's bogus land reform. PKM identified the case of land concentration like the 7,100 hectares of land tightly gripped by the Yulo Family, the largest hacienda in Laguna, covering Calamba, Cabuyao, Sta. Rosa, and Biñan.

According to PKM-Laguna, the eviction of farmers is rampant in Yulo land which is sold to big bourgeois compradors like the Ayalas. Irrigated lands are converted to golf courses, subdivisions, industrial parks, and other commercial uses, which do not benefit the peasant masses. "How can we plant on paved roads and asphalts on which huge buildings stand? We will be driven to starvation if this continues," according to PKM-Laguna.

The struggle for national industrialization should be discussed. Establishing this will support economic development. This is necessary to create jobs, raise incomes and meet the basic needs of the people.

Widespread poverty, unemployment and low wages of the toiling masses must be discussed. According to the state's own statistics, up to 2.3 million jobs were lost in September. An additional 358,000 lost



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Groups commemorate first year of Ka Joma's martyrdom

The first year of the martyrdom of Comrade Jose Maria Sison, great Filipino leader, teacher and communist, was commemorated through conferences and cultural performances.

Hundreds of individuals, both veteran activists and youth, gathered at the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman for a discussion and reflection on the writings of Ka Joma. Entitled "Reflections on Palestine, the Philippines, and the Struggle for a Just and Lasting Peace," guests of the activity gave reflections or personal descriptions on Ka Joma's writings including "Our Urgent Tasks," an article on Israel's aggression and massacre of the Palestinian people, writings on peace talks between the NDFP and GRP, "On Revolutionary Violence," and his final statement "The Filipino People's Democratic Revolution is Invincible."

In Utrecht, The Netherlands, comrades and friends of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines gathered at the office of NDFP International where they featured speeches, songs, poetry readings and other cultural performances to commemorate the colorful and meaningful life of Ka Joma.

Units of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army nationwide also launched various activities to commemorate and honor Ka Joma. Some fronts held pledge renewals to the Party on the same day to affirm wholehearted service to the Filipino people and to offer their lives for the victory of the people's democratic revolution.

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jobs were dropped from the labor force during the same period. The number of informal economy workers also increase.

The real value of workers' wages is constantly being eroded. In NCR, the real value of the ₱610 minimum earned is only ₱504. This is even less than half of the ₱1,189 daily living wage level. On average, workers nationwide receive only 35.5% of the living wage.

The Marcos regime's blatant subservience to its imperialist US master should be discussed. It allows the US to drag the Philippines into the outbreak of an inter-imperialist war against China, and the use of the entire country as its base under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement and other military treaties.

The defense of the Philippine national sovereignty against the interference and attacks of imperialist China in the West Philippine Sea should also be discussed.

Justice for the thousands of victims of human rights violations must be discussed. From December 1, 2022 to December 1 this year, Ang Bayan recorded 957 cases of human rights violations and 127,386 victims of the US-Marcos regime. Its armed forces brazenly devastated rural communities, using a campaign of aerial bombing, artillery shelling and strafing.

These, and other socio-economic issues, are what the US-Marcos regime is trying to avoid and wants to cover up in the possible reopening of negotiations.

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NPA-Negros fires at 2 military detachments

RED FIGHTERS OF the New People's Army (NPA) stealthily approached and opened fire on two military detachments in Negros last week.

On December 13, the NPA-Central Negros opened fire at the patrol base of the 62nd IB in Barangay Sandayao proper, Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental around 8:00 pm. Two 62nd IB troopers were wounded.

On December 11, the NPA-Southwest Negros fired at the detachment of the 15th IB in Sityo Pangi, Barangay Inayawan, Cauyan, Negros Occidental. The people's army unit quietly approached the detachment to disrupt the resting soldiers.

These are part of an average of four monthly armed offensives by NPA units in the island of Negros in the past year. This is a clear affront to the 3rd ID's statement that the people's army is almost decimated from the island and the target of finally "crushing" the NPA is near completion.

Bus drivers hold protests at LTO office

BUS DRIVERS FROM different companies protested at the Land Transportation Office (LTO) in Quezon City last December 18 demanding to scrap the agency's unjust Demerit Points System that was implemented as early as 2019. The action was led by Manibela or the Malayang Alyansa ng Bus Employees at Laborers.

The system, a part of Republic Act 10930, imposed double "demerit points" for drivers of public vehicles compared to private vehicles. In line with this, when a driver gets 40 "demerit points" due to "violations" of traffic laws, his license will be revoked for two years.

Thousands of bus drivers and workers are being pressured and are in danger of losing their livelihood as a result. It has intensified in recent months as local governments and the coast guard have colluded in enforcing the policy. They insist that drivers "violate" traffic rules because of the chaotic transportation system. Designated loading and unloading areas of passengers have not been implemented.

Marcos accountable for the massacre of drivers' and operators' livelihood

The US-Marcos regime is set to run-off public utility vehicles (PUVs) with its insistence to implement the forcible removal of traditional jeepneys and other mass transportation from the road in the guise of modernization by the end of the year. This will lead to the massacre of livelihoods of thousands of drivers and operators and suffering for ordinary commuters reliant on jeepney as their main mode of transportation.

The forced consolidation of franchises and the formation of "corporations" or cooperatives is only the first step towards the eventual complete removal of jeepneys from streets, replacing them with old and new vehicles and laying out grandiose, very expensive and debt-financed transportation infrastructures. (See the related article "Slaughtering the King of the Road, a sacrifice on the altar of imperialist Japan" on page 6.)

On December 12, Marcos outrightly misrepresented that "70% of the operators have already entered and consolidated" under the bogus modernization program. He insultingly tagged as a "minority" the thousands of drivers and operators who fought the bogus program since 2017. In fact, the state had been forced to extend the "deadline" twice due to the opposition of the majority of those in the sector.

Furthermore, it was pure distortion of the truth. According to the drivers, the data parroted by Marcos refers to the total number of consolidations for all types of PUVs nationwide, including buses. In fact,

only 26% of the jeepney units have consolidated in the National Capital Region (NCR), while only 36% of the UV Express have consolidated. This shows the widespread opposition of drivers to forced consolidation.

When the new year starts, about 30,862 units of jeeps and 4,852 units of UV Express will not be able to operate in NCR as they are not consolidated. Nearly 64,000 drivers and 25,000 operators in region will lose their livelihood. This will drive nearly 20,000 families throughout the NCR to starvation. Nationwide, 64,639 PUV units have not consolidated and 140,000 drivers and 60,000 operators will lose their jobs. This will affect 28.5 million passengers.

In its attempt to deceive drivers, the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) issued Memorandum Circular 2023-051 on December 15, allowing units that have already filed for consolidation to travel pending their approval by the agency. Drivers considered this an "underhanded" move by the agency to continue to force them to consoli-

date franchises.

Deception of consolidation

The price of a "modern" vehicle assembled domestically using imported engines and parts, and one that has passed the Euro-4 emission standard, is around ₱1.8 million-₱2.6 million. A fully imported vehicle costs ₱4 million. This is beyond the capability of drivers and operators. Nevertheless, some of them took the risk, consolidated their franchises, and bought, through credit, units that conformed to the program's standard.

An article by the Ibon Foundation exposed the consequence one such cooperative that has turned to consolidation and "modernization." Its drivers and operators borrowed a whopping ₱70 million from the bank to acquire 15 modern jeeps in 2020, to which they added 11 units the following year.

They had to raise ₱33,000 monthly for each unit to pay off the loan. Wages and maintenance add to the operation of the cooperative. In their calculations, a daily remittance of ₱6,000-₱7,000 per unit is needed to prevent operational losses. In reality, a unit can only remit up to ₱3,000 per day.

High prices of gasoline burdens them doubly because modern jeeps consume twice as much. The resulting monthly income is not enough for the drivers and their families. Others just went back to driving a traditional jeep that incurs lower oil consumption and to the "boundary system" (paying rental to a single operator.)

According to drivers and operators, in their long years of driving jeepneys, they experienced being bankrupt only under "modernization." One even said he used to earn ₱3,900 "boundary" with three units



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Slaughtering the King of the Road, a sacrifice on the altar of imperialist Japan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), in cahoots with the successive Duterte and Marcos regimes, blame traffic, pollution and economic losses to force the phaseout of traditional jeepneys and replace them with Japan-made surplus vehicles or new electric vehicles. Japan has allocated \$10 billion in "climate finance" to implement various "initiatives" to combat climate change, including "low carbon" transport programs like the jeepney phaseout.

The phase out took shape through the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) under the Duterte regime in 2017. But the push began as early as 2012, when the ADB did a series of researches on the transport system in Davao City, which later became the Davao Public Transport Modernization Project in 2015. The project's main objective is to close down the current system of jeepneys, buses and tricycles in the city and replace it with a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, using bank-approved vehicles, machinery and material. (There is a similar research series in "transportation modernization" for Metro Manila in 2017).

In July, the ADB granted the

Davao local government (held by the Dutertes) a \$1 billion loan to start the implementation of the BRT. This will reduce commuter routes from 120 to 29 and replace over 7,000 traditional jeepneys and thousands of tricycles with 1,100 buses. Alongside this change is the refitting of Davao roads, the laying of new roads, the construction of sheds, depots and bus terminals, the renovation of intersections, construction of a driving school, and a thousand and one things to be adjusted to make the BRT system work. A total of ₱73.37 billion is required to fund the project. Apart from loans, funds will be taken from the national and local budgets.

To neutralize small drivers and

operators objecting to the underhanded phaseout, their organizations were attacked using the entire state fascist machinery. From 2017, the local government also forcibly implemented franchise consolidation.

The ADB brags that the BRT-Davao will serve as a model for transport "modernization" nationwide. Next in line are the BRT-Quezon City and BRT-Cebu.

Killing the king of the road

To justify driving traditional jeepneys off the streets, the ADB and the reactionary state in its "researches" propagated the view that jeepney design and technology are "outdated," maintenance is inadequate and operations are uncoordinated. (One such research was prepared by the Enrique Razon Logistics Institute of De La Salle University for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.)

The most used mode of trans-

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of traditional jeep, but now only earn ₱625 daily with the "modern jeeps."

Transport crisis

Undoubtedly, the sudden and forced removal of traditional jeepneys from streets will be a huge pain to commuters when the year starts, or even after the grace period the LFTRB gave to give the majority of franchises the chance to consolidate. In Metro Manila alone, they transport an estimated 75.8 million passengers per kilometer, according to a 2015 study. It is the most widespread mode of transport, the most affordable, and according to experts, most suitable for the climate and existing Philippine roads, especially in the provinces.

Fare is estimated to increase

more than twice, once the kings of the street are removed. According to a study by a University of the Philippines institution in 2021, the minimum fare of a modern jeepney could go up to ₱34, from the current ₱13 for the first four kilometers on a traditional one. Even now, the modern jeep fare is ₱2 more expensive.

According to the study, cooperatives will be forced to raise fares to pay for the very expensive modern jeeps and cover periodic maintenance due to their poor quality.

Life-and-death struggle

Drivers and operators again launched a transport strike and mass protest nationwide this December. They held a two-day transport strike on December 14-15 and marched to Mendiola to protest. They shouted: Marcos traitor to the

driver, heartless to the commuter, puppet of the corporate and foreigner!

The groups Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng Tsuper at Operator Nationwide (Piston) at Samahang Manibela Mananakay at Nagkaisang Terminal ng Transportasyon (Manibela) also announced that they will continue with their protests, mass actions and transport strike until the end of the year, before they are completely banned from streets.

According to Piston and Manibela, drivers, operators and commuters will continue to fight the forced consolidation and crap, oppressive, and bogus PUV Modernization Program. They are determined to "corner" the Marcos regime and charge it for the massacre of the impoverished Filipinos' livelihood.

AB

portation that millions of Filipinos rely was tagged "unsafe, uncomfortable, a health-hazzard, and unreliable because it is never on time." Among the many excuses given were its lack of a door and having passengers board and disembark from behind the vehicle and not into "sidewalks." Nevertheless, these studies provided no data on the alleged damage associated with jeepneys, such as accidents, and others.

The jeep, originally made from military vehicles left behind by the US during World War II, and for decades had been transporting citizens to their destinations, suddenly became a "menace on the street."

It was declared a "major contributor" of pollution, even when it comprises only 300,000 of the 12.75 million various type vehicles nationwide and emits lower than 15.5% of the Philippines' total recorded GHG (greenhouse gasses).

When small drivers and operators opposed the program, they were labeled "anti-modernization," and, in not a few cases, communists and "NPA" to intimidate and silence them. They were forced to compromise on what the ADB called a "just transition" consisting of a one-shot aid to the affected families and a loan to buy a vehicle worth a staggering ₱2 million.

(Meanwhile, the attack by ADB and the state ignores the source of nearly 85% of GHG, such as factories, plants, large businesses, and other vehicles. Also deafening is its emphasis on the traditional jeepney as a "pollutant" while Japan and its own industries, including the vehicles they force into the Philippines, are far more responsible for global carbon dioxide emissions.)

Replacing jeeps, the state and the comprador bourgeoisie introduced fabled "climate-resilient" vehicles such as the Hinu XU343, Isuzu-Centro, Isuzu-Almazora and Toyo Motors E-Jeep, all made in Japan. They allegedly pass the European emission standard, the standard that serves US and European car manufacturers.

They are labeled as "modern jeeps" and "e-jeeps," even though they bear no resemblance to traditional jeeps and are actually Japanese and Korean-designed minibuses.

With their prices beyond the reach of drivers and operators, the biggest compradores and bureaucrats seized the opportunity to build corporations with hundreds of registered vehicles to appropriate the major and biggest routes. (Along with franchise consolidation is the plan to reduce routes and limit them to one or a few cooperatives or corporations.) Meanwhile, operators who fell into the trap and relied on the promises of consolidation and "modernized jeepneys" are now drowning in debt at falling-apart vehicles. (See related article "Marcos accountable for the massacre of drivers' and operators' livelihood" on page 5).

Profitting from loans, profitting more from the product

The ADB is a multilateral bank built by imperialist Japan to channel surplus capital of the Japanese state and monopoly capitalists. It exports such capital in the form of official development assistance or ODA or loan and other financial instruments for "development projects." Aligned with its financial monopolist nature, these loans facilitate the sale of Japanese services and surplus goods, primarily heavy machineries and vehicles. It is based in Mandaluyong city.



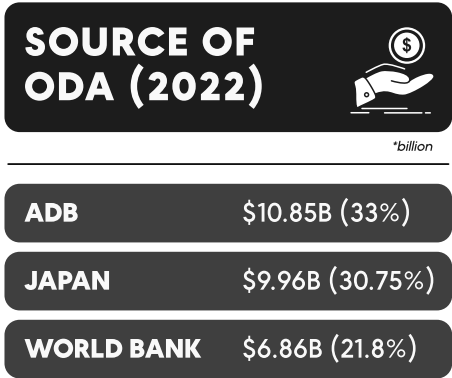
The Philippines is one of the biggest "beneficiaries" or borrowers from the bank and from Japan itself. Two-thirds (2/3) of the ODA that the Philippines "receives" is Japanese. According to its website, it pushes at least 30 infrastructure projects in the Philippine transportation sector. More than 20 of them are active, five are at the approval level and two are at the proposal level. (Meanwhile, the World Bank holds 18 projects in the sector.)

Its loan conditions are the use of Japanese expertise, design, machinery, and often but not always, products. It regulates the procurement process (equipment and supplies purchase) and awarding of contracts. In BRT-Davao, for example, the purchase of 1,100 buses conforming to Japan's "strict" standards was stipulated on the loan.

Under PUVMP, the Philippines will become a giant dumping ground for mostly used cars (second hand) from Japan, Korea and even its rival China—along with its surplus products such as cameras, air conditioning, wifi, fare collection systems, and other add-ons made requisites for "modernization." It will also serve as a long-term market for batteries, parts and engines needed for vehicle maintenance. Electric cars will become clients of operating and yet-to-operate foreign renewable energy plants.

Like the BRT-Davao, the jeepney phaseout is part of a larger design to replace the entire transport system. This encompasses large-scale infra-

Sundan sa pahina 8



74th IB summarily kills Northern Samar peasant

Wanton shooting from soldiers of the 74th IB killed farmer Pido Mendes in Barangay San Jose, Mapanas, Northern Samar on November 22. This military unit, under the command of BGen Noel Vestuir of 802nd Bde, was then at the midst of a focused military operation.

From 2013, Mendes, 60, has been pursued by soldiers after he escaped the 34th IB's capture. He has since been living in his farm in the countryside to avoid the soldiers.

Arrest. After staging a fake encounter, 94th IB soldiers arrested farmer Pokoy Rebradilla, along with his son, in Sityo Karanawan-Buli, Barangay Buenavista, Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental on December 7. He was subjected to torture and illegally detained in its camp in Barangay Tambo, Ayungon, Negros Oriental.

Abduction. Two pregnant *hors de combat* fighters of the New People's Army (NPA)-Southeast Negros were abducted on December 18 and presented as "surrenderers" on December 18 by the 11th IB. Picked up in Siaton, Negros Oriental, they are

currently being kept *incomunicado* by the military.

Militarization. The 62nd IB poured hundreds of military troops in Binalbagan and neighboring towns in Negros Occidental since December 9. Its purpose is to silence and suppress the relatives and residents in their call for justice for Braulio "Banny" Tubalado who was killed by soldiers last December 6.

More than 100 62nd IB soldiers are conducting operations in Sityo Sunflower in Barangay Santol and Sitio Tambo, Barangay Amuntay in Binalbagan. Soldiers forcibly evacuated 15 families from Sityo Karanawan, Barangay Amuntay on December 9. Up to 100 people along with their children were affected by this forced evacuation.

Harassment. The US-Marcos regime arbitrarily detained and de-

ported Edna Becher, Filipina-Swiss activist and chairwoman of Anakbayan-Switzerland, on December 7. She was detained for more than two hours at the NAIA Terminal 3 before being forcibly deported to Switzerland. She was "black-listed" due to her alleged "anti-government activities." Becher was one of the activists who protested when Marcos Jr. went to Switzerland last January.

In Bicol, the 903rd IBde harassed Reynard Magtoto, a member of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines and Baretang Bikolnon journalist.

Meanwhile, on December 18, two mass leaders in Cebu were granted bail in a frustrated homicide case filed by the military. John Ruiz III, coordinator of Bayan Muna Central Visayas, and Jhonggie Rumol paid their bails after learning of the case involving them in the armed encounter between the NPA and the AFP in Toboso, Negros Occidental last April. AB

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structure projects such as road-widening and laying "missing" road networks (or where none exist), repairing and laying bridges where there are none, laying new traffic systems, building gigantic terminals for "modern jeeps," developing a uniform fare-collection system (replacing conductors), and many other targets of Japan surplus capital and products.

Some related and interconnected projects have been approved such as the Metro Manila Bridges Project and the Epifanio de los Santos Greenways Project, as well as the renovation of LRT 1 and LRT 2. Also approved is the project of laying a new rail system such as the North-South Commuter Railway Project that will con-

nect to the existing railway tracks (LRT 1, LRT 2, MRT.) The Manila Metro Rail Transit Line 4 Project will set to be approved soon.

Largest among the projects is the \$7-billion subway project "co-financed" by ADB and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Japanese companies clinched contracts to supply 25 tunnel boring machines and other machinery, as well as for exploration, design and land boring.

In all of these projects, the ADB, the Duterte regime, and now the Marcos regime, are babbling that they will deliver an "affordable, safe and reliable" mode of public transportation to make its killing of the people's livelihood acceptable.

59th IB desecrates remains of casualties killed in Batangas

FAMILIES HAVE BEEN given a hard time in recovering the remains of those killed in an encounter between a unit of the New People's Army, and elements of the 59th IB, at the border of barangays Dilao and Malalay, Balayan, Batangas on December 17. At the last report, six bodies were tracked down by human rights groups who conducted a fact finding mission in the area.

The families of the murdered found the bodies of their relatives simply left on the floor in the hallway of a funeral home. One of the slain was immediately buried without informing the family. The funeral home was heavily guarded by soldiers who blocked the lawyers and paralegals accompanying the families.

The groups denounced the military's desecration of the remains of those killed, which is against international humanitarian law. They said, the 59th IB is clearly responsible for the countless human rights violations in Batangas.



Bai Bibyaon Ligkayan Bigkay

great Talaingod Manobo leader and symbol of the Filipino national minorities' resistance died last November 20.

Various organizations paid tribute and recognized Bai for her firm principles and defense of the rights of national minorities.

Attacks against journalists and media in Gaza

since October 7

64

KILLINGS

13

WOUNDED

19

ARRESTED

3

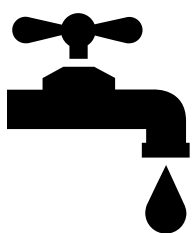
MISSING

Cases of mass attacks and massacres against families of journalists were also recorded.

Source: Committee to Protect Journalists, December 15, 2023

9 OF EVERY 10

in Gaza are unable to eat everyday due to the ceaseless attacks of the Zionist Israel.



₱6.41 at ₱7.87

increase in water rates per cubic meter to be imposed by Manila Water and Maynilad starting January 2024. This is second of the planned five-tranche increase yearly from 2023 to 2027.



₱5.55B

tax and contribution of teachers for GSIS, PhilHealth and another agency remain unremitted by the Department of Education under Sara Duterte.

This can result to penalties and deduction from benefits of teachers and other workers in the sector.

600,000 HECTARES

irrigated land which underwent land-use conversion in the last 10 years, mostly in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog. This decreased land allotted for palay farming and other food.

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

The OFW amid longing and crisis

The Christmas season, for most of the overseas Filipino workers (OFW), is not only a time of celebration but also a time of intense longing and aspiration. Their most cherished gift: to be with their loved ones.

Amid the severe economic crisis, social challenges, and ongoing political turmoil worldwide, many OFWs are facing the bitter reality that their dream of returning home may not be realized this Christmas or in the near future.

Miriam, a caregiver, and Ana, a domestic worker, in the United Kingdom, typify the dream of many OFWs who want to go home but are prevented by many obstacles. "If only our desires prevail, we would love to go home. But airfare is very expensive and we are always discouraged by the very difficult situation in the Philippines. If we can't get back here, what then?" they said.

As for Carlos, a seaman who temporarily landed in Southampton, England, "It's okay if I have no noche buena, as long as I can send money and gifts to my family. Even in that way I can make my family feel I am with them this Christmas."

More than an estimated 300,000 Filipino migrants are in the United Kingdom, making it the largest OFW-populated in all of Europe. Meanwhile, Filipinos remain at 75% of the total

population of seafarers in the world.

They all have a common dream: education for their children, a peaceful home, and a stable future in the Philippines for their loved ones. Behind this, financial challenges, deep indebtedness, insecurity and hopelessness in the Philippines continue to worsen their situations.

Recently, a supposed government analysis came out claiming that many OFWs are already "planning" to return home after five years overseas. It wasn't true then, and it's even more improbable now.

The worsening economic crisis in the Philippines, characterized by the inflation of the prices of goods and basic services, lack of farm land and jobs, and widespread oppressive government policies cause uncertainty in the return of OFWs. Most of them left the country because there were no decent jobs in the Philippines. They worry that if they return to the Philippines, their additional financial burdens and job insecurity may double or triple.

Anti-migrant and anti-worker



policies, rising cost of living and unemployment in the Philippines are the main reasons why OFWs are reluctant to return home. "The plan to go home is constantly there. But we always have to consider a lot of concerns. This is not an arbitrary decision that can be taken for five or a few years," said Carlos.

"If the government really wants OFWs to return home, it must ensure there are enough opportunities for us to survive and support our families. OFW remittances have long been considered the lifeblood of our economy, but why has there been no progress until now?" said Miriam.

Ana adds, "Then news shows the President (Marcos) frequently going abroad. How easy for him to go abroad and return home at whim. They are claimed 'official trips', from the country's treasury. Is that how our remittances are spent?"

According to Migrante International, in order to solve the problem of forced migration of Filipino workers, the government's response should be living wages in the Philippines, not labor export policy.

On December 18, migrant workers and their families commemorated the International Day of Migrants by condemning the Marcos regime for neglecting the urgent issues of OFWs and Filipino migrants while intensifying the state's labor export program.

Meanwhile, despite the challenges and distance, OFWs continue to hope that one day, they can return home and be with their loved ones on a Christmas truly abundant for their families and Filipino society.

AB

Groups commemorate International Human Rights Day

DEMOCRATIC GROUPS IN Metro Manila commemorated through protest the International Human Rights Day, in connection with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on December 10. Similar protests were held in the cities of Baguio, Legazpi, Naga, Bacolod, Cebu, Iloilo, Roxas, Davao and the town of Kalibo in Aklan.

Karapatan and Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) led thousands of Filipinos to protest in 11 action centers in the country to denounce the reactionary government of its more than 1.6 million victims of human rights violations since Marcos assumed power last year.

The groups also condemned the US' role in the Philippine government's devastating counter-insurgency policy which they deem part of its interference in the country and in the Asia-Pacific. They also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people who continue to face the US-Israeli campaign of genocide in Gaza and the West Bank.



KM lightning rally. Kabataang Makabayan (KM) boldly launched a lightning protest along Recto Avenue in Manila on December 10. KM-Southern Tagalog also staged a lightning protest in UP-Los Baños on December 19. They did so amid the US-Marcos regime's inclusion of the organization on its list of "terrorist organizations." The rally was part of the organization's 59th anniversary celebration on November 30.

Mass layoff in Converge ICT. Converge ICT workers protested the layoff of 600 Metroworks (Converge's sister company) workers across Metro Manila last November. They picketed at the Regional Conciliation and Mediation Board-NCR in Quezon Avenue, Quezon City on December 6 coinciding with the Converge ICT company's "redundancy program" and "cost-cutting" hearings. The company is owned by the Uy family of Angeles City.

Petition against NTF-Elcac in Negros. Negrosanon farmers and rural poor protested in front of the local Commission on Human Rights in Bacolod City on December 7 to demand the immediate dismantling of the National Task Force-Elcac. At the same time, they filed a formal petition and engaged in dialogue with agency officials. Around 1,500 farmers and rural poor signed the petition. The petition was spearheaded by Human Rights Advocates Negros and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas Negros.

Privatized water services in Bulacan lambasted. Members and supporters of the Alliance for Consumers Protection-CSJDM protested in front of the Water District office in Barangay Minuyan III, San Jose del Monte, Bulacan on December 11 to denounce poor service and excessive charges to consumers. The water service was privatized since May 2018 when the local government entered into a joint venture agreement with PrimeWater Infrastructure Corporation owned by the Villar family.

Fishermen of Sorsogon prevails. Fishermen in Gubat, Sorsogon were able to have some of the anti-fishing provisions in Fishery Administrative Order No. 264 of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources removed from the order on December 11 after the petition and collective actions by the Save Gubat Bay Movement since June. They will once again be allowed to fish for king crabs that were unjustly banned by the agency.

Health workers fight for wages, benefits and rights

HEALTH WORKERS AND their union led by the Alliance of Health Workers (AHW) have launched intensive protests and mass actions this December. The AHW have taken weekly actions in hospitals and government agencies.

From December 5 to December 12, protests have been held by unions from the Philippine Orthopedic Center, National Children's Hospital, Philippine General Hospital, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center of the Philippines and Philippine Children's Medical Center, Tondo Medical Center, Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center, San Lazaro Hospital and Fabella Hospital in Metro Manila.

On December 13, they stormed the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to demand the swift release of funds for their benefits.

The group also denounced the appointment of Department of Health Secretary (DOH) Teodoro Herbosa. They say Herbosa is unfit as DOH secretary because he is anti-health workers, a Red-tagger, and supports privatization of public hospitals and health services.

PLGA week celebrated in India

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT in India, led by the Communist Party of India (Maoist), celebrated the 23rd anniversary of its armed wing, the People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) from December 2 to December 8. The PLGA was established on December 2, 2000. Concurrently, the Indian revolutionary movement also commemorated the killing of three members of their party's Central Committee who were killed on December 2, 1999.

This year, the CPI-Maoist also declared the week as Palestine People's Struggle Action Week. This is in solidarity with the historic struggle of the Palestinian people against the US-supported occupation and genocide by Zionist Israel.

According to the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist), the Palestinian people's armed resistance against the occupation is just and should be supported. He said citizens should act to hold Zionist Israel war criminals accountable.

"In our country, the fascist Modi, like Israel's Netanyahu who promotes imperialist US dictates, has banned any opposition to his stance on the current genocide of the Palestinians," said Comrade Amrut, spokesperson of the CPI (Maoist) in international affairs.