

ANG

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Pinapatnubayan ng Marxismo-Leninismo-Maoismo

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EDITORIAL

## Hold responsible Marcos, foreign capitalist plunderers and cohorts

**R**elatives of more than 100 people who died in the February 6 landslides in Masara, Maco, Davao de Oro demand justice. They know that the deaths of their loved ones was not caused by a simple accident or tragedy of nature, but by conditions created by profit-hungry plunderers, and complicit bureaucrat-capitalists and the state's armed forces.

Even before all the bodies could be recovered from the landslide, the Marcos government was quick to exonerate the Apex Mining Corporation, the largest mining company in the area. Apex is owned by Enrique Razon, one of the country's biggest bourgeois comprador and staunch Marcos supporter who secures major government contracts. Despite Marcos defense, Razon cannot escape responsibility for the deaths of 100 in Maco, mostly workers or people working for his company.

The Maco tragedy is a reminder

of the numerous disasters in Mindanao, Cordillera, Marinduque, and other areas resulting from environmentally-destructive mining, plantations, energy projects, ecotourism and reckless construction of infrastructure. Due to widespread destruction of forests and mountains, millions of Filipinos suffer from landslides and widespread floods in cities and rural areas which cause large numbers of deaths, destruction of livelihood and worse poverty.

Mining in the Philippines has long been controlled by foreign

multinational corporations. They swept into the country during the US-Marcos dictatorship, which pocketed kickback from its operations. With the neoliberal push of liberalization and deregulation, and behind the false veil of "mining for development," the Mining Act was enacted in 1995, giving foreign companies the right to fully own and run large-scale mines in the Philippines, especially in gold, copper, nickel, chromite, zinc and other minerals, which further intensified the widespread environmental destruction.

Historically, American companies are primarily behind the largest mining operations in the country. Currently, these are owned or capitalized by American, Canadian, Chinese and Australian

companies and banks. Mining in the Philippines does not serve the local economy. Extracted minerals are exported by the country, mainly to steel industries in China and Japan.

Worldwide, mining operations have intensified in the pursuit of imperialist countries for the cheapest source of raw materials. In the past two decades, global demand for nickel has doubled, mainly due to the size of China's imports (which consumes 60% of the total nickel supply) for its steel industry, which forms a major part of its effort to dump surplus capital through infrastructure projects in its so-called Belt and Road Initiative.

The Apex Mining tragedy will certainly be not the last in the face of the Marcos regime's effort to swing the country's door open to foreign investments, which will continue to pave the way for devastating and plunderous operations of profit-hungry capitalists. Multinational companies in mining, agriculture, energy, tourism, and infrastructure are now swamping different provinces nationwide. They will flood in further if Marcos succeeds in amending the constitution to open the door to foreign plunderers.

For decades, the Lumad people in Mindanao, other indigenous people and peasants in various parts of the country, have been subjected to violence, oppressed, driven away and robbed of their ancestral land. This is done for the sake of foreign companies and large capitalists and bureaucrats. Marcos continues to aggravate brutal state suppression and terrorism against people opposing foreign mining and environmentally destruction.

Despite having declared Davao de Oro and southern Mindanao provinces as "insurgency-free," combat troops of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) continue to



build camps in communities to intimidate people and repress their resistance. Wherever there are mining operations, the AFP is there to sow fascism. Many of these units are in the payroll of mining companies and serve as private armies to provide security.

The Maco tragedy underscores the need for the Filipino people to intensify their struggle against foreign mining and plunder of the country's environment and wealth, from the mountains to ocean. We must unite the Filipino masses and raise their awareness and determination to fight large companies that are destroying the environment, as well as the AFP's aerial bombings of forests.

The masses should be mobilized in their numbers against the further destruction of the environment to prevent new tragedies, rehabilitate the mountains, and defend the country's patrimony for the benefit of the people and their future democratic government. The mass movement of the indigenous peoples and settlers plays an undeniable crucial role as they are the direct victims of the destruction of the environment. Thus, they are also the first to be attacked by the fascist AFP to pave the way for the operations of foreign companies. They are partners with the peasant movement, and various democratic forces in the cities to strengthen the mass movement in defense of the country's wealth and environment.

The revolutionary armed struggle is the most effective way of defending the environment. The New People's Army has repeatedly proved its determination and strength to sanction or eventually drive away foreign environmental plunderers and in shooting the fatal spear against the pro-imperialist reactionary state. In the face of the Marcos regime's efforts to fully open the country to foreign mining companies, it is imperative for the NPA to strengthen to defend the masses and the environment. **AB**

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## Contents

<b>Editorial:</b> Marcos, foreign and local partner capitalist plunderers must pay	1
Death in mining	3
IPs oppose Benguet Apex-ISRI mining	4
SC grants writ of amparo and habeas data	4
NPA holds political-military training	5
Protests	5
Groups celebrate Ka Joma's 85th birthday	5
Scrap the 5-year Rice Liberalization Law!	5
Broad anti-chacha alliance set to protest	6
Sitio Balubad residents foil demolition	6
In short	7
"Detrimental effects" of wage increases	8
Military arrest, surveillance and harassment	8
Jeepney phaseout, burden to women	9

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# Death in mining

The February 6 landslide disaster in Maco, Davao de Oro (formerly Compostela Valley) is just the latest of a number of tragedies suffered in the province that is one of the Philippines' mining centers, and not the first involving the company Apex Mining Corporation. The people of Davao region, and the Mindanao Lumad people as a whole, have long stood up against large-scale mining.

Amid tragedy at its doorstep, shedding crocodile tears and feigning sympathy, Apex did not for one minute stop its operations and compelled remaining mine workers to continue working.

## History of destruction and plunder

Apex began mining the Mansaka tribe ancestral land in Maco in 1976. As elsewhere, it not only destroyed the ecology of the forest and land, it also destroyed Mansaka traditional livelihood and culture. Over the years, it drove the Mansakas out of their communities, and enslaved them as mine workers or its support system.

It has long been notorious for low wages and unsafe working conditions. Its operations were suspended in 2000 after workers protested. It resumed large-scale mining under the supervision of foreign companies Goldridge Mining Corporation (a US company), Viclude Mining Corporation, and Mintrikor Inc. in 2003, Crew Gold (then a Canadian company) bought it in 2009, which in turn sold to ASVI (Malaysia) in 2009. Enrique Razon Jr's Monte Oro and his com-prador partners bought it in 2013.

Apex currently mines areas under two MPSAs—MPSA-225-2005-XI covers 679.02 hectares in the neighboring villages of Masara and Teresa, and MPSA-234-2007-XI which covers 1,558.53 hectares in the adjacent barangays of Masara, Mainit, Tagbaros, New Leyte, Elizalde and New Barili in Maco and some parts of the adja-



cent town of Mabini. In 2023, the company further expanded its operations when it purchased Asia Alliance Mining Resources Corp. holding a permit to mine 20,000 hectares in Maco, Mabini and Maragusan, all in Davao de Oro.

The two MPSAs are valid for 25 years and can be extended for an additional 25 years or until 2030 and 2032. An estimated 1,250,000 ounces of gold will be extracted within the scope of the two MPSAs alone. In 2022, the company earned a net income of ₱3.339 billion, which is 316.1% higher than in 2021. In 2023, it recorded a net income of ₱2.3 billion in the first nine months alone.

For plundering natural resources, the reactionary state charged the company only 4% excise tax. The company even consistently delays paying its meager 1% obligation to local governments and tribes. After almost four decades, the only contribution Apex can flaunt to the community is a school and a health center. The housing for its own workers was even built in partnership with a non-government organization. Most infuriatingly, the Mansaka tribe remains one of the poorest in the country and enslaved on their own land.

According to the company's own study, its mining area frequently experiences downpours, especially between November and

February. The soil is loose and the slopes are prone to slide. It also lies on a fault line, and vulnerable to earthquakes. In another state study, 80% of Davao de Oro was declared a "geohazard" or dangerous area. Despite these, the province's mining operations, especially of Apex, not only continued but also expanded.

Environmental groups estimate that many landslide incidents go unreported. In addition to its open-pit mining, Apex builds underground tunnels. This agitates soil and rocks from below, further increasing the likelihood of collapsing large chunks of mountain soil.

## History of violence

As elsewhere, mining in Davao de Oro is accompanied by violence. Successive reactionary regimes launched brutal campaigns of repression and militarization against community clusters in Mansaka. In 2017, at least three battalions of the AFP began mass aerial bombardment, pressuring civilians to "surrender," killing mass leaders and ordinary civilians, illegal arrests and detentions, and other abuses and threats.

The province teems with CAFGU detachments and military camps, serving as guards and protectors of mine operations. The

*"Death in..." continue on page 4*

# Benguet indigenous peoples reject Apex-ISRI mining plans

Indigenous people in Sityo Dalicno, Barangay Ampucao, Itogon, Benguet are actively resisting Marcos government's looming approval of the Application for Production Sharing Agreement 103 (APSA 103) by Itogon-Suyoc Resources, Inc (ISRI) which will cover their ancestral land. They say the many irregularities in the process of obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) are cause for its nullification. ISRI is a company owned by Enrique Razon Jr.'s Apex Mining Corporation Inc.

According to the Dalicno Indigenous Peoples Organization (DIPO), NCIP manipulated the acquisition of FPIC. It did not share enough information with the assemblies leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) on September 20, 2023. It also did not seek the consent of affected communities, which was how it was done before in Itogon.

"This issue has divided the Itogon people. The Dalicno community, who organized themselves as DIPO, is being denigrated as a breakaway group and treated with spite by so-called authorized indigenous organizations. Dalicno, however, [stands]...as a legitimate stakeholder especially since their land, life, and livelihood are on the line," the organization said.

APSA 103 will cover 581 hectares of ancestral land in the barangays of Ampucao, Poblacion, and Virac in Itogon, Benguet. The mining operations will cover the entire sityo of Dalicno, including their water sources, sacred burial grounds, schools and churches in the so-called "build-up zones."

The people of Dalicno do not believe that the mine will not affect them just because the MOU stipulates that the "build-up zone" will be a "no mining zone" and the water resources will be in a "buffer zone". They say the impact of mining, especially Apex Mining which owns ISRI, is evident in the recent landslide in Masara, Maco, Davao de Oro. AB

"Death in..." from page 3

66th IB under the command of the 10th ID is encamped here. This division has a long list of war crimes and human rights violations not only in the Davao region but also in Bukidnon, Agusan del Sur and Surigao del Sur.

Among the victims of the 66th IB was Marcelo Monterona, murdered by soldiers in January 2014 in front of his shop. Monterona was a council member of Indug Katawhan, the organization that led protests against Apex Mining for the harm it brought to the farming and Lumad communities. In 2013, the organization drove Apex to pay ₱3.6 million in damages and repair damaged infrastructure after Typhoon Pablo hit their community.

On April 10, 2014, Red fighters under the New People's Army-Southern Mindanao Region attacked the Apex mine as sanction for its continued expansion of underground and open-pit mining in Davao de Oro. This is despite the revolutionary movement's repeated warnings of the widespread damage these bring to Lumad communities and the environment.

During this time, the company deviously expanded into Maco's remaining forests, which the revolutionary people in the area declared protected. Apex's other accountabilities include 1) failure to compensate the victims of two landslides in 2007 and 2008, 2) low wages and arbitrary worker layoffs, 3) failure to rehabilitate rivers and bridges in Maco, which it promised to Maco residents, and 4) actively funding the combat operations of the 9th IB then deployed in the province.

To the joy of mining companies, the military declared Davao de Oro "insurgency-free" in 2022. Despite this, several AFP battalions remain stationed in Lumad and workers communities to suppress any resistance by the people. Amid constant oppression and violation of rights and especially facing environmental despoliation, the people's spirit to stand up and fight remain ablaze. AB

## 2 environmental activists, granted writ of amparo and habeas data

THE SUPREME COURT granted the petition of Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano, environmental activists abducted by military agents, for writs of amparo and habeas data. They won this petition after continuously demanding and exposing the brutality of the military and NTF-Elcac since their illegal abduction on September 2, 2023. The two were secretly detained for two weeks and subjected to torture and threats to their lives.

Pursuant to the order, military agents and NTF-Elcac personnel are prohibited from approaching the two activists within a one kilometer radius. They also have the right to access and have their personal data collected by the state be deleted to protect their security and right to privacy.

The court awarded a temporary "protection order", while the petition for a Permanent Protection Order and Production Order is pending before the Court of Appeals.

## NPA-Central Negros launches political-military training

AMID INTENSIFIED MILITARY operations in the guerrilla front, Red commanders and fighters resolutely launched a Political-Military Basic Course on January 20-27. The activity aims to arm the fighters with basic political-military principles to bravely resist the Marcos regime's counter-revolutionary campaign of repression.

The training also forms part of the guerrilla front's effort to overcome ideological, political and organizational weaknesses that hinder the comprehensive advancement of the people's war in their area of responsibility, especially in the field of armed struggle, according to the New People's Army (NPA)-Central Negros.

"The exercise was carried out successfully because of the revolutionary cooperation of the fighters and commanders, and the unwavering support of the masses for the unit's economic, financial and security needs," the unit said. The one-week training boosted the courage and determination of participating fighters.

According to Ka Monique, a Red fighter, "it's really better when you train because you won't fear facing the enemy, especially considering that this is part of our central duty as an army." Political-military trainings like this helps "avoid a purely military mindset or being militaristic...because to be good militarily, is to be good at politics," said Ka Turko, platoon leader and main instructor in the training.

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### Groups celebrate Ka Joma's 85th birthday

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT, its allies, and local and international friends celebrated the 85th birthday of Comrade Jose Maria Sison on February 8. They launched various activities to exalt Ka Joma's significant contributions to the Philippine revolution.

In Rizal, Kabataang Makabayan (KM)-Rizal put up wheat paste art and painted slogans in several key areas in Rizal on February 11. Ka Joma's portrait was featured in the wheat paste art by the youths plastered in populated areas in Barangay San Juan, Taytay. They also painted slogans on walls calling on young people to join the New People's Army and participate in the people's war.

In Utrecht, the Netherlands, allied organizations of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) held a cultural program.

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### Scrap the 5-year Rice Liberalization Law!

FARMERS' AND WOMEN'S groups protested in Mendiola in Manila on February 14 to call for the repeal of the Rice Liberalization Law (RLL), which was enacted on the same day in 2018. They denounced the liberalization of rice imports that further increased the price of rice, contrary to its promise to lower the price. The end of 2023 saw the "rice inflation" recorded at 19.6%, the highest in the past 14 years. Compared to 2022, rice increased by almost ₱10 per kilo last year. At the beginning of 2024, rice prices increased further by ₱1-₱2 per kilo. Meanwhile, farmgate prices of rice in the country further dropped.



**PUP anti-privatization rally.** Students of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) protested before the House of Representatives in Quezon City on February 12 as a hearing was held on the National Polytechnic University (NPU) Bill that will allow further privatization and commercialization of university education. The proposal contains provisions that would allow the entry of private businesses within the university. Police violently dispersed the youth protest.

**Black Hearts Day.** Health workers from private and public hospitals in Metro Manila and Baguio City launched "Black Hearts Day" on February 14, Valentine's Day. They say the black heart is a symbol of their frustration with the Marcos regime for its continued denial of living wages, delayed benefits, widespread contractualization in the sector and other long-standing demands of health workers.

**NCR teachers' unions demand salary increase.** Teachers' associations and unions in the National Capital Region led by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT)-NCR Union have been launching various forms of collective action to call for an increase in their monthly salaries. They started their actions on February 14, Valentine's day, and continued to February 17.

**Resolve 2022 election fraud!** Konta-Daya members, together with the TNTrio group, marched before the Comelec office to demand it to prioritize the investigation of the numerous anomalies raised in the 2022 election, rather than processing the bogus people's initiative. The groups have long submitted their grievances to the agency, and petitions have also been filed before the Supreme Court, to investigate the massive fraud that installed Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte to power.

**One Billion Rising against violence on women.** Groups and organizations nationwide launched on February 14 the annual dance-protest One Billion Rising (OBR) campaign against abuse and violence on women. Gabriela, a national women's alliance, led the main OBR activity in the Philippines which was held at the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman. Their activity revolved around the theme "Rise for Freedom—Be The New World."

# Broad anti-chacha alliance, to protest on EDSA Uprising's 38th anniversary

More than 100 organizations and individuals under the No to Chacha Network gathered on February 15 to oppose the Marcos regime's plan to amend the 1987 Constitution (charter change or chacha), through any form. They also announced the commemoration of the 38th year of the EDSA Uprising, which they say gave birth to the constitution.

The groups are against attempts to amend the constitution either through a bogus people's initiative or constituent assembly. They say these attempts are "unnecessary, divisive, costly, and focused mainly on keeping those in power in place."

Instead of working for chacha, the groups and individuals called for officials to focus on raising wages and income, lowering the prices of goods and basic utilities, providing social services, curbing corruption and red tape, promoting human rights, justice and peace, defending sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea, protecting the environment and ensuring clean and credible elections.

National-democratic organizations, Makabayan bloc congressmen, 1Sambayan members, former government officials, church people, student groups, teachers, other labor groups and many others attended the gathering. Justice Antonio Carpio, Com-

missioner Rene Sarmiento, Bishop Gerardo A. Alminaza, Atty. Neri Colmenares, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, former DSWD Sec. Judy Taguiwalo, Gerardo Alminaza, chairman of One Negros Ecumenical Council (ONE-C) and bishop of San Carlos City and many others were also there.

Former senator Kiko Pangilinan, Atty. Lutgardo Barbo of PDP Laban and the office of Sen. Koko Pimentel, Fr. Daniel Franklin Pilario, president of Adamson University, Dr. Noel Leyco, former president of the Manila City University, and Diwa Guinigundo, former deputy governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines signed the unified declaration.

Meanwhile, various groups launched widespread activities to oppose chacha over the past month.

In Bacolod City, church people and democratic organizations led by ONE-C gathered on February 10 to launch a broad campaign against

chacha. On February 8, various individuals in Davao City joined the Way Chacha (No Chacha) alliance. Various organizations also launched the No To Charter Change Coalition-Panay in Iloilo City on February 20.

On Valentine's Day, farmers and women's groups marched to Mendiola against the Rice Liberalization Law. Their call: food on the table, not cha-cha!

On February 16, youth and students in the University Belt marched in Manila to oppose the commercialization of education and the Marcos regime's pro-foreign chacha. National-democratic youth groups gathered at the University of Santo Tomas in España and marched to the Far Eastern University campus in Morayta. They insist chacha will allow full foreign ownership of the operation of education which will cause greater burden on the youth.

On the same day, workers gathered at the EDSA Shrine raising the slogan "higher wages, not chacha." Earlier, they launched an action before the Senate in time with the hearing on the ₱100 salary increase bill filed before it.

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## Sitio Balubad residents foil demolition attempt at Angeles City

RESIDENTS OF SITIO Balubad, Barangay Anunas, Angeles City thwarted yet another attempt by the police, with the complicity of Clarkhills Properties Corporation, to demolish their community since February 7. At least 100 police and SWAT members, with an additional 50 personnel, were sent to the site to forcibly evict the residents.

The planned demolition will affect more than 500 households in the 72-hectare land claimed by the said company. An estimated 2,000 residents are victims of land grabbing. In addition, it is feared that the adjacent barangays of Cuayan and Sapangbato will also be affected by landgrabbing and demolition.

Despite the absence of a memorandum order, the police, SWAT and

demolition team once again forcibly entered the people's barricade in Sitio Balubad. The butchers not only looted, but even mauled and injured the leg of the owner of the house they tried to demolish. Other residents immediately responded and defended their community.

The police wantonly terrorizes the residents. They cocked their firearms against civilians. The demolition team

threw stones at the residents injuring 20. State forces and the demolition team even returned the next day and forced their way into the barricade.

The solidarity and defense of the residents once again drove the police away and foiled the demolition. This is also what happened in October 2023 when an attempt was made to dismantle their barricade to enforce the demolition.

The families in the site demand that they own the land and that they have certificates of land ownership award (CLOA) and receipt of full payment to the Landbank of the Philippines. AB

# 200 HECTARES

of forests in the Cordilleras razed in 33 reported incidents from January 1 to February 6.

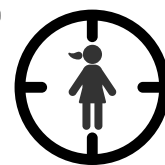
The largest of these occurred in Itogon, Benguet (134 hectares) starting at the **Philex Mining Corporation** area in Barangay Ampucao.

Source: Northern Dispatch



# Hind Rajab

6 years old



one of more than 12,300 Palestinian children killed by the US and Israel in its brutal genocidal war on Gaza.

She was deliberately killed while locked in a car fired upon by Israeli forces, causing the immediate death of her uncle, aunt and three young cousins who were in the car with her.



# 20%

increase in water bills in Davao City charged this February while the city was submerged in floods.

The increase is part of the total 60% rate hike this year following the privatization of water services under the Davao City Bulk Water Supply Project built by Apo Agua Infraestructura, Inc.



# ₱21.8 BILLION

or ₱0.087/kwh in Meralco refunds to consumers were ordered by the **Energy Regulatory Commission** for Meralco after the company arbitrarily raised the electricity bill this February.

# ₱26.7 BILLION

DSWD budget insertions for the "**Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita Program**" (AKAP) was "discovered" by senators. It is feared that the fund was used in the chacha signature drive.



**1 in every 100** young Filipinos (almost half a million) suffered sexual abuse through online livestreams and sale of their photos and videos where they are made to perform obscene acts for the sexual gratification of adults.

Source: International Justice Mission



# ULOS 2023



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# February 4-11, 1974

the "**Battle of Jolo**" took place when forces of the then less than 1-year Marcos dictatorship raided Jolo, Sulu resulting in the **dislocation of 40,000** and **the death of an estimated 10,000 Moros**.

# Fallacies of the "detrimental effects" of wage increases

Capitalists, their congressional defenders and state agencies, once again sang in chorus about the "detrimental effects" of wage increases on the economy and the workers themselves. "Small businesses will close!" "Fees and prices will increase!" and worst, "It will burden workers!"

These excuses have long been repeatedly debunked. Ibon Foundation's study of the country's history of wage increases shows wage increases do not always precede increases in prices of goods and services. Many times, in fact, inflation went down, six months after wage increases.

These excuses are mere speculation, having no basis in Philippine history to prove direct causality between wage increase and price increases [of goods]. In practical experience, inflation rates have soared without even a minuscule increase in wages.

What is clear however is that workers' wage levels have not kept up with relentless increases in the prices of goods. In December 2023, the real value of the ₱610/day minimum wage in the National Capital Region fell to

₱505.23. Conditions are worse in other regions nationwide.

It is also not true that a wage increase of ₱100/day or raising wages to ₱750/day or even ₱1,100/day will be detrimental to "small companies". First, wage increase orders do not cover "micro" businesses (mostly *sari-sari* stores ran by unpaid family members or unpaid family workers). There are also many ways to ensure that small companies with 20 workers or less can keep up, such as providing financial assistance, low interest on loans, charging them less or no tax, helping them cope with high prices of production inputs and transportation charges, and many others.

Actually, wage orders cover only big businesses that make millions in profits but never raise wages until

pushed by the unions or by the state, when forced by the labor movement. The Sy family's malls, which pay the minimum wage to shop assistants and cashiers, are prime examples of short-changing workers, despite flaunting annual profit growths.

Big capitalists shamelessly use the "bankruptcy" of small businesses to drown the just demands for them to grant living wages to their workers.

Second, claims that "vast majority" of workers "will not benefit" from wage increase are false. More than half (51.4% or 3,163,581 out of 6,155,893) of the formal sector workers work in large companies earning billions, and thus have grounds to demand higher wages for their respective families to live decently. They will use the extra income to meet their minimum needs, such as food and transportation, which are mostly produced by local farmers or

*"Fallacies of the..." continue on page 9*

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## Military arrests, surveillance and harassment in Negros, Bicol and Southern Tagalog

Cases of arrests, surveillance and harassment by military elements against progressives and activists in the Negros, Bicol and Southern Tagalog regions were recorded in recent weeks.

In Negros Occidental, police arrested Pertinisa Jereula Charita, 55, while visiting her husband at the San Carlos City jail on February 13. According to Human Rights Advocates Negros (HRAN), police falsely claim confiscating a caliber .22 pistol from Charita when frisked.

Charita, a member of Kapatid-Negros and the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW), is the wife of Leon Charita arrested in September 2019 on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Pertinisa was with her children and grandchildren when she visited Leon to cele-

brate his birthday in prison.

In Albay, soldiers of the 9th ID surveilled and harassed relatives of Maggie Seva and Fidel Miranda, administrative officer and staff, respectively, of the Farmer's Assistance for Resource Management, Education and Rehabilitation Incorporated (FARMER Inc) during the first half of February. The relatives of the two were subjected to illegal interrogation.

In Rizal, a 2nd ID element went house-to-house in Barangay San Isidro, Antipolo City, Rizal in the second week of February and inquired

about mass leaders of the progressive movement in Rizal. The soldier was in plainclothes and pretended to be an employee of Antipolo City Hall to carry out the surveillance. Neighbors say the soldiers took the mass leaders' personal information and cell-phone numbers.

In Oriental Mindoro, military and police personnel disrupted and threatened fishermen and humanitarian groups conducting a Boat Construction Project in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 7. The project aims to distribute boats and fishing equipment to victims of last year's oil spill. After disrupting the program, the military shamelessly claimed that the program was part of the National Task Force-Elcac campaign. **AB**



# Jeepney phaseout, burden on women

Always anxious, always stressed. Of course, that's our sole means of livelihood," shared Aling Myrna, wife of a jeepney driver who is also a bus conductor, when asked about the Marcos regime's Public Utility Vehicles (PUV) phaseout program. This is the general sentiment of drivers and operators, their wives and families, even as the deadline of mandatory franchise consolidation was moved again to the end of April.

Over the past months, Aling Myrna has participated in the struggle to demand the restoration of individual franchises and completely scrap the bogus PUV Modernization Program. Like her, 51-year-old Aling Jenny also joined the movement to defend their livelihood.

## How will we survive?

Aling Myrna's husband has been a jeepney driver in a Metro Manila city for sixteen years. Aling Myrna's job as a supervisor in a sewing factory used to support them, but they now depend mainly on plying their jeep after she got sick and got laid off during the pandemic. She used to earn a measly ₱15,000 per month without any benefits. Nevertheless, it helped augment their expenses.

Currently, the couple earns ₱2,800 from daily transport. But they only take home a net of ₱850 for every 12 hours of working after deducting ₱800 "boundary" (jeep rental), ₱150 per for their rented room, and ₱1,000 fuel expenses. The relentless rise in oil prices over the past seven weeks has struck them hard.

Aling Myrna and her husband fear the pending PUV phaseout because driving is his only work skill. "My husband is anxious when the phaseout

was announced. Of course that is where he is accustomed to ... he is not used to working in other fields of transportation," she explained.

If they were to be kicked off the road, she does not know where to get their daily income. For food, the couple spends ₱300 a day. She mocked the government's "recommended" ₱63 daily food cost for one person. "That's it? What is your meal going to be, a single piece of dried fish?" she said.

Her ₱200 daily maintenance medicine, including insulin, is an additional expense. They are also supporting the school fees of their Grade 8 child who is in the province.

Aling Jenny and her husband, a driver of 17 years, are in a similar predicament. They are afraid, especially that the operator of their jeep refused to be placed under consolidation. The operator refused because he will have to give up seven jeepney units.

If they lose their jeepney, she said, her husband will just have to look for another job. "We can't do anything," she said. She now sidelines by selling food in the eatery in the garage of their route. The couple has six children and five of them are still studying. One is only in Grade 1.

## Withdrawal from forced consolidation

In conservative government data as of December 2023, 1,767 jeepney routes nationwide or approximately 31% of the total 5,716 jeepney routes refused consolidation. Around 727 of the consolidated routes have a consolidation rate of less than 60%. Bicol has the largest number of unconsolidated jeepney routes at 451 or 68% of the total routes in the region. While 35% of the jeepney routes in Metro Manila do not have consolidated jeepneys.

The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) brags that the number of those submitting to consolidation is "increasing" since the extension of the consolidation period. But contrary to this, associations of drivers and operators report that some of their members have withdrawn from the compulsory scheme.

With the rottenness of the mandatory consolidation and PUV Modernization exposed to the core, drivers and operators now demand the return of the franchises they surrendered to the scheme. They fear suffering the same fate of many others who went bankrupt and lost all their livelihood because of the program.

The Land Transportation Office (LTO) continues to force drivers and operators to submit to franchise consolidation and declared it will consider jeepneys as *colorum* (illegal) if they continue to ply their routes. They even warned that this is a "crime" where one can be imprisoned and fined.

While the implementation of the consolidation, which is part of the bogus PUV Modernization Program, is pending, the livelihood of drivers and operators and their families also hang in the balance. In the face of this, their call is united: return individual franchises, scrap forced consolidation and the bogus modernization program itself.

*"Falacies of the..." from page 8*

services rendered by their fellow small earners.

Third, profits of large and medium-sized companies will be reduced by less than 6.7% if wages were increased by ₱100. Even profits of micro and small enterprises will go down by only 7.6%-7.9%.

On the other hand, this means a more substantial wage increase and

higher income for workers. In fact, ₱100 extra is equivalent to a measly ₱2,000 additional per month. A wage bill being floated in Congress proposes a more significant ₱400 increase in daily wages which would be equivalent to an extra ₱8,000 per month. However, this will still not cover the minimum needs of families, which require a minimum wage increase of ₱600 per day. **AB**