



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL

Let the election circus begin!

The circus known in the Philippines as the Presidential Elections has begun. From now until May 2022, seasoned politicians, showbiz and sports personalities and other wannabees will dance, sing and bamboozle their way to be the next President of the Republic of the Philippines.

President Rodrigo Duterte and his cronies fired the first shots when they staged a coup d'etat within their own ruling party PDP-Laban. World boxing champion Sen. Manny Pacquiao, feared as a rival for the presidency, was ousted as PDP-Laban chairman. Duterte's camp is set to declare sycophant Sen. Bong Go as their candidate for President and Duterte himself as candidate for Vice-President. The smear operation against Sen. Pacquiao is expected to turn nastier in the coming days.

Former movie actor Manila Mayor Francisco Domagoso, very popular with his constituents, is also feared as a rival to the Duterte autocracy. No wonder he's suddenly a target of Duterte's smear operation.

Meanwhile, unrepentant butcher Sen. Panfilo Lacson and comedian Sen. Vicente Sotto III have thrown their hats into the ring as candidates for President and Vice President, respectively. Sen. Lacson has already begun taking potshots at Duterte's officials, accusing the Department of Health, Philippine National Police and National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict of "misuse" of public funds.

We are not amused. Beyond the hilarious song and dance routines, the election circus is nothing but an act played exclusively among rival factions of the economic and political elite. Dramatic spiels about becoming President for the poor and oppressed Filipinos will become blood-thirsty expletives against the protesting masses after the elections. Grand promises to end poverty, landlessness, unemployment, government corruption and political dynasties will become soft whimpers just a year after the elections. After all, it is not about who best represents the interests of the Filipino people. It is about who can best represent and defend the interests of US imperialism and the local ruling classes of landlords and big comprador bourgeoisie.

The election circus highlights neocolonialism and the bankruptcy of democracy in Philippine society. It throws a spotlight on the conflicts within the local ruling classes and cracks within the oppressive and repressive ruling system. It provides ample opportunity to raise the consciousness of more Filipinos to the scam of the song and dance routines. That the oppressed working people must forge ahead on the revolutionary path to national liberation, democracy and long-lasting peace. **UP**



Sen. Drilon demands review of PhP 19-Billion anti-communist funds

Philippine Senate Minority Leader Sen. Franklin Drilon urged the Commission on Audit on 2 August to conduct a special audit on the PhP 19.2-billion budget of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). He said he will also ask the Senate leadership to demand that the NTF-ELCAC submit a report on how its budget was used.

Sen. Drilon was reacting to a COA report which showed that Duterte's anti-communist task force was able to spend only 12% of its PhP 722.95 million budget in 2020, and

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Sen. Franklin Drilon. Photo: wikimedia.org

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yet was appropriated PhP 19.2 billion for 2021. The NTF-ELCAC is proposing a PhP 40 billion budget for 2022. “We have more than sufficient funds for counterinsurgency, millions of which remain untouched, unobligated and unspent,” he said.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said the Senate needs to find out why the NTF-ELCAC funds were underutilized. “There is an obvious flaw somewhere... we will find out,” he said.

Earlier on 15 July, Sen. Drilon said the national government “does not need to give a single centavo to the NTF-ELCAC for 2022.” The funds, he said, could be used “in aid of the 2022 elections,” referring to corrupt government officials’ practice of using government funds for their election campaigns.

Last year, several lawmakers objected to giving the NTF-ELCAC billions of pesos in funding, saying the money will just be used to ‘red-tag’ or stigmatize critics of the Duterte administration.

Marco Valbuena, Chief Information Officer of the Communist Party of the Philippines, welcomed Sen. Drilon’s demand to investigate the NTF-ELCAC spending. Valbuena said the PhP 16.4 billion Barangay Development Program is being used by the NTF-ELCAC and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to influence the outcome of the 2022 local and national elections. “It paves the way for enlarging the military’s political influence that is dangerously combined with their armed might,” he said.

Valbuena revealed that the NTF-ELCAC classification of 822 villages as “cleared of the New People’s Army” is dubious. He said at least 50 of these villages saw armed encounters between the NPA and AFP since January 2020. He also said that some of the villages listed are not even considered part of the areas of operation of the NPA.

Valbuena also criticized the government construction of one-kilometer cemented roads, empty school buildings and empty health clinic buildings in the rural areas. He doubted the government had also allocated funds for the hiring of teachers, doctors, nurses and health workers, and for school materials and healthcare equipment, “so that they will not turn out to be empty buildings.”

Valbuena said, “The broad sectors of the people demand a stop to how their money is being squandered on wasteful and corrupt counterinsurgency operations and white elephant projects.” **UP**



Photo: J. Ellao | bulatlat.com

Millions suffer hunger under ‘Duterteriorating’ economy – IBON thinktank

A report of Philippine thinktank IBON Foundation in June 2021 showed that 15 million Filipino families, comprising 62.1% of the country’s total, went hungry in 2020. The report said that 12.4 million families were surviving on just PhP132 (US\$2.61) or less per person per day, a far cry from the minimum PhP1,026 (US\$20.30) per day needed for a family of five.

The IBON report, “Duterterioration of the Economy,” revealed that the economic situation of the Philippines and the Filipino people are deteriorating on multiple fronts, even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020.

Agricultural production’s share in the country’s GDP fell from 10.1% in 2017 to 9.2% in 2019. IBON said that 1.4 million agricultural jobs have been lost between 2017 and 2019. Already meager growth in the manufacturing sector has been falling from 8% in 2017, 5.1% in 2018 to just 3.8% in 2019.

The Duterte years have seen record levels of joblessness. Job generation has been on a downslide to just 477,000 annually in 2016 – 2019, compared to previous periods of 815,000 annually in 2010-2014 and 541,000 annually in 2011-2015. From January 2020 to March 2021 alone, there were 5.4 million unemployed. Full time work fell by 550,000 and low paying part-time work increased by 3.2 million.

Prices of basic commodities are skyrocketing. The 4.5% inflation rate in April 2018 was already the highest in 7 years, but the 9.7% food inflation in September 2019 has been the highest in 11 years.

In the meantime, government funds are allocated for the anti-communist programs to the neglect essential public services and the Covid-19 pandemic response. The share of public health in the national budget fell from 4.9% in 2019 to 4.5% in 2020. In 2021, agriculture production and agrarian reform only had a 3.2% share in the national budget.

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IBON said that the situation is made worse by the government's "inept Covid-19 response." Snail-paced vaccination, vaccine supply anomalies, government policies riddled with corruption, favoring Duterte's cohorts in the government, the military and police, while neglecting the people, said the IBON report.

Taking note of the worsening crisis, the Communist Party of the Philippines on 13 August said, "The Filipino people are like tinder waiting to be kindled to become a mighty flame that will end their hardships under the oppressive and failed regime.

"The people's heightening desperation – for food, aid and vaccine – must be drawn and transformed into a force of resistance... The people must be led to the path of collective action and not segregation; to the path of struggle and not supplication," the CPP said. **UP**



Photo: cpp.ph

NPA marks Duterte's SONA with 11 offensives in 4 provinces

The New People's Army mounted 11 tactical offensives in the central Philippine provinces of Samar, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental and Sorsogon from 15 to 29 July, challenging President Rodrigo Duterte's last State of the Nation Address which he delivered on 26 July. The Communist Party of the Philippines said initial field reports indicate that Duterte's armed forces sustained 30 casualties with at least 26 killed.

In Northern Samar province, the NPA mounted an ambush against Duterte's armed security forces on 23 July in San Isidro town, killing 11 soldiers. On the same day, the NPA ambushed another armed enemy unit in Catarman town. On the day of Duterte's SONA on 26 July, an NPA sniper unit killed a police officer and wounded another in Catubig town. The guerrilla forces had an armed encounter with the same police unit on 10 July in the villages of Anongo and Hitapian, where two police officers were wounded. On 29 July, the NPA ambushed a company of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Las Navas town, killing an officer and wounding two others.

The NPA mounted the tactical offensives despite the enemy's focused military operations in the area, lasting already for half a year. Under the guise of the 'Retooled Community Support Program', Duterte's armed security forces have been harassing the residents of 25 rural villages, forcing them to 'surrender'.

The CPP also reported that in two armed clashes on 20 and 21 July in the town of Candoni, Negros Occidental province, five elements of the AFP were killed. On 22 July, in an encounter in Kabankalan City of the same province, the guerrilla forces killed three AFP soldiers. In the adjoining province of Negros Oriental, in Guihulngan City, the NPA-Central Negros mounted a harassment operation against an armed civilian auxiliary unit of the AFP on 21 July.

In Sorsogon province, the local NPA unit launched a sniping operation on 21 July against an armed checkpoint of the Philippine National Police in Bulan town, killing an officer of the PNP Provincial Mobile Force.

The NPA tactical offensives were aimed at punishing the armed security forces of the Duterte government who continue to perpetrate killings and suppression campaigns against the unarmed civilian population in rural Philippines. **UP**



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