



UPDATES PHILIPPINES

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EDITORIAL Bloody forecast for the May 2022 elections

The race is on! The campaign period for the 9 May national elections kicked off on 8 February to gaudy and flamboyant proclamation rallies. President Rodrigo Duterte is illegible for reelection, under Philippine laws, but the entire election campaign is focused on the tyrant nonetheless. Vying to rule the Manila government are Duterte proxies, Duterte aspirants and those who, for the time being, vow to reverse the tyrant's traitorous, murderous and larcenous legacy.

Duterte himself naturally wants to remain in power. He's privately cowering from the Filipino people's righteous rage and demands for justice, as well as from the prospects of being tried before the International Criminal Court. As we have noted, the coercive and financial resources of the Manila government and his underwriters will be utilized in full to ensure that he, his proxies or even his aspirants will come out on top in May 2022.

But the Duterte ruling clique is no longer as invulnerable. Former staunch allies in the Philippine Senate have exposed billion-peso rip-offs in the Covid-19 supplies contracts, spoiling Duterte's 'corruption-free' façade. Military and police generals, weary with kowtowing to China and ever-subservient to the US, are overtly and covertly lining up behind opposition rivals. Foreign and local comprador capital sense these cracks in the ruling clique, and will place their bets on contenders who can better represent their interests. The bloody tradition of Philippine elections will exhibit itself once again: glitzy political campaign rallies will camouflage hideous political assassinations.

Away from the limelight, Duterte's security forces will intensify its bombing raids, armed occupation and repression of the peasant and indigenous communities in the countryside. In their futile zeal to end the armed revolutionary movement before June 2022, body count and 'surrendered' villages will continue to pile up, the dead and impoverished all conveniently labeled communists and terrorists.

The call for an International Observer Mission to monitor the May 2022 elections is thus welcome news. Organizers have correctly noted that the bloody violence of past elections and the mass murders which characterize the Duterte regime, are portents of the violence which could erupt in 2022. Foreign, independent observers are set to visit all 12 Philippine regions, vowing to be a protective presence for election officials, the voters and the general public.

Parallel to the commendable efforts of the international community and local election watchdogs, the people's democratic government shall enforce its policies within its territories, prohibiting politicians from vote buying, intimidating the public and bringing armed security escorts. **UP**



*EX-ALLY. Senate Blue Ribbon Committee Chairman Sen. Richard Gordon.
Photo: ptvnews.ph*

Senate report recommends corruption charges against Duterte, officials

Philippine Senator Richard Gordon released on 1 February the draft report of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee which investigated the anomalous US\$920 million Covid-19 government supply contracts with Pharmally Pharmaceutical Corporation. The report recommends filing of plunder, graft and other criminal charges against Department of Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, Department of Budget and Management Undersecretary Lloyd Christopher Lao, Deputy Ombudsman Rex Warren Liong, Duterte economic adviser Michael Yang and Pharmally top executives.

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The report also recommended filing charges against President Rodrigo Duterte when he steps down from office for the betrayal of public trust, for his hand in allowing his friends to rob government coffers, as well as for obstructing the investigations of the Commission on Audit and the Philippine Senate.

The Senate Blue Ribbon Committee uncovered several anomalous transactions, including the granting of at least eight government supply contracts worth US\$226 million to Pharmally, based on the backing of Duterte adviser Michael Yang. Pharmally did not have sufficient capital, was not a manufacturer of the supplies and would just serve as a middleman for the supplies coming from China. The report revealed that personal protective equipment supplied by Pharmally were found to be about 102% overpriced, while Covid-19 test kits were 86% overpriced. The company also supplied expired face shields by tampering the expiration dates on the boxes.

Pharmally used Armed Forces of the Philippines planes to transport the supplies from China. And despite pocketing billions of pesos from the government supply contracts, the company and its executives did not pay Philippine taxes. It was also reported that government officials signed for deliveries which never arrived.

Commenting on the Senate investigation, the Communist Party of the Philippines said, “It is impossible that Rodrigo Duterte has nothing to do with the grand conspiracy... He is in the center of the swindle perpetrated mainly by his Chinese businessman friend Michael Yang, officials of Pharmally and officials of the Department of Budget and Management.”

A majority of the 24-member Philippine Senate would still need to approve the report of the Blue Ribbon Committee before it becomes official. Sen. Gordon said 11 senators have already committed to sign the report but also pointed out that at least three are hesitating to sign.

Majority of the Senate are known Duterte associates, including Senators Bong Go, Imee Marcos, Ronald dela Rosa, Pia Cayetano and Francis Tolentino. **UP**



International Observer Mission launched to monitor 2022 Elections

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines and local election watchdog Kontra Daya announced on 6 February the launching of an International Observer Mission to monitor the forthcoming Philippine national and local elections which will take place on 9 May 2022. The IOM aims to provide independent monitoring from the start of the campaign period on 8 February until the confirmation of elected candidates in June 2022.

The ICHRP is a global network of human rights defenders and legal experts concerned with the rights situation in the Philippines. It had initiated international tribunals in the past several years to investigate systematic violations of human rights in the Philippines and provided submissions to the International Criminal Court for further investigation and prosecution. Philippine organization Kontra Daya (Against Fraud) is a nationwide network of social scientists, teachers, IT experts, religious officials and activists. It has a track-record of documenting and exposing election fraud and election-related violations of human rights in the past several elections.

Peter Murphy, ICHRP Chairperson, recalled that Philippine elections have historically been marred by inter-elite rivalry, warlordism, vote-buying corruption, intimidation and various forms of violence against candidates, voters and even journalists. In the 2019 congressional elections, at least 33 people were killed and 19 others wounded in poll-related incidents. Murphy added that the current elections are taking place under the Duterte government which is being investigated by the International Criminal Court for its tens of thousands of killings in the so-called ‘drug war’.

The ICHRP reiterated that policies of the Duterte government, including the Anti-Terrorism Act, embolden the police and military to attack activists, peasant leaders and indigenous peoples. These incidents, they said, highlight the dangers of the electoral process under the Duterte government that seeks to escape culpability for the crimes against humanity it is being charged.

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Danilo Arao, Kontra Daya convenor, said, “The 2022 elections are important in defending whatever remains of our democracy.” He said the initiative for international observers is much appreciated, because it helps bring worldwide attention to the country as it battles state-sponsored repression. Murphy and Arao agreed that the IOM could offer a “protective presence,” during the forthcoming elections. **UP**



WAR CRIMINALS. FA-50 fighter jet used in bombing villages in Gonzaga, Cagayan. Photo: wikipedia.org

AFP bombs rural villages in Cagayan Valley

Fighter jets of the Armed Forces of the Philippines dropped at least 30 bombs on four villages in the town of Gonzaga, Cagayan province. Three helicopter gunships simultaneously carried out indiscriminate strafing with .50 caliber machine guns. The aerial attacks were carried out in four waves at 4:30 am, 5:00 am, 9:40 am and at 12:00 noon on 29 January on the villages of Sta. Clara, Sta. Isabel, Sta. Teresita and Magrafil, all in Gonzaga town.

Gonzaga is a town in Cagayan province, located in the northeast tip of the Philippines, some 600 kilometers north of Manila.

Marco Valbuena, Chief Information Officer of the Communist Party of the Philippines, denounced the AFP attacks, “These mountains serve as home and source of livelihood of indigenous Agta communities. Entire ethnic minority and peasant communities were struck by fear as a result of the air strikes and left their homes to seek safety.” He said at least 56 families have evacuated to the village gymnasium in Sta. Clara.

“We denounce the AFP for dropping bombs in the proximity of Agta communities which endangered the lives of civilians, terrorized people, and damaged forest resources from which local ethnic communities draw their food, water and medicine,” Valbuena said.

AFP officials claim the mountainous area is uninhabited.

Peter Murphy, Chairperson of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines also condemned the aerial bombardment, calling it a violation of international humanitarian law. “We call for an immediate thorough independent investigation and the immediate access of humanitarian relief to the area,” he said.

“The AFP had already claimed to have wiped out the New People’s Army in the area and there have been no reports of NPA operations in the area in the most recent months,” Murphy added. “This is a case of indiscriminate military attack on a civilian population... The population of farmers and indigenous people have been subjected to ‘red tagging’ and fake surrender of alleged NPA fighters, which are notorious forms of political repression in the Philippines.” **UP**



PROFITEERS. Photo: cpp.ph

Denounce monopoly control on global oil prices -- CPP

The Communist Party of the Philippines called on the Filipino people to denounce monopoly oil companies and oil producing countries who collude in controlling global oil prices and to demand an immediate rollback in the domestic prices of petroleum products.

Marco Valbuena, CPP Chief Information Officer, pointed out on 1 February that the successive increases in petroleum prices in the past few weeks are among the biggest reasons behind the worsening socio-economic conditions in the country. “In the face of a worsening

economic crisis, widespread unemployment and loss of livelihood, incessant petroleum price increases deal heavy blows against the workers, peasants and other toiling people. In the past month alone, diesel prices have increased by PhP7.95 per liter, kerosene by PhP7.20 per liter, and gasoline by PhP5.70 per liter.”

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These hefty price increases add to the already heavy burden of rising costs of living brought about by the non-stop increases in the price of transportation, food, medicine and basic services, and the cost of input for manufacturing and agriculture.

Valbuena stressed that the utterly callous profit-hungry monopoly oil companies and oil producing countries are restricting production in order to push up prices and rake in superprofits at the expense of the toiling masses. Many financial speculators and oil companies who have bought oil futures and oil reserves at lower prices are making a killing with the sharp rise in prices.

The CPP further urged the Filipino people to express their outrage against the Duterte regime for failing to act in the interests of the people in the face of rising prices of all basic necessities.

The worsening poverty and further economic breakdown in the Philippines are also felt by the working peoples around the world. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warns of a diminishing rate of growth of global output after 2021. "Rising poverty, job losses, shredded safety nets, health-care systems pushed to the brink, and the impacts of a changing climate are placing the Sustainable Development Goals further out of reach." **UP**

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