



Paninindigan

Ang pahayagan ng Bayan

Espesyal na Isyu Hunyo 2005



Enough of Gloria

THE ARROYO REGIME has been pushed to a corner and appears to have no way of weathering the latest scandals and controversies rocking the administration. In the past weeks, a volley of serious allegations have shaken the national leadership. Members of the First Family have been tagged as recipients of jueteng payola. On top of the jueteng payola, the nation also witnessed the unfolding of the taped conversations between President Arroyo and Comelec Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano. The events of the past two weeks have undoubtedly further isolated the Arroyo government from the people.

Before these scandals even came out, Arroyo's popularity ratings have dropped steadily since the last quarter of 2004. She has so far earned the lowest approval ratings since the Aquino administration. The declining popularity can be attributed to the people's economic woes. The people have been besieged by frequent oil price hikes, power rate increases and a deluge of new taxes.

In the face of mounting protests, the Arroyo government has veered towards more repressive measures, labeling critics as "destabilizers" and "enemies of the state." In the first few months of the year, leaders of progressive organizations, including priests, lawyers, journalists, activists, have been killed at an alarming rate. Other repressive measures such as the National ID System and the Anti-Terrorism Bill are being pushed.

Indeed, Arroyo has lost any legal and moral basis to govern. A wide array of forces including the progressive mass movement, the Legal Opposition, church leaders and even retired military officials are now calling for a change in the leadership.

Joblessness, inflation, poverty, indebtedness have become synonymous to the Arroyo government. These problems have worsened under her rule.

Intolerable economic crisis

Under the Arroyo regime, the poor majority has been pushed deeper into poverty. Oil prices constantly increase. Water and power rates have also gone up. Prices of basic commodities went up and are expected to go even higher because of taxes.

Instead of reducing the people's burdens, the Arroyo government railroaded the approval of the expanded value-added tax (VAT). To ensure payment of foreign debt, international lending institutions pressured the Arroyo government to impose new tax measures. The VAT measure is seen as a clear indication of Arroyo's puppetry to foreign interests.

Despite the rise in prices, the Arroyo government refused to grant the workers demand for a P125 wage hike. Regional wage boards approved meager increases. For many Filipino families, hunger has never been so common.

The Arroyo government repeatedly said it could not do anything to prevent prices from increasing. However, it is the regime's continuous adherence to globalization that has caused the people's further impoverishment. Under such a policy, foreign interest will always be above the people's welfare. Deregulation of the oil industry, for one, continues to benefit the giant oil companies. Trade liberalization, meanwhile, has stunted the agricultural sector. Land-use conversion and land-grabbing continue, displacing thousands of farmers and farm workers. Local businesses fold up in the face of fierce competition with the giant companies, resulting to massive retrenchment of workers. Furthermore, with the Supreme Court upholding of the Mining Act of 1995 as constitutional, foreign mining corporations can exploit the country's mineral resources.

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The Greatest Deception

The legitimacy of the Arroyo presidency has been questioned even before the controversial tapes came out.

After the elections, various surveys showed that majority of the Filipino people believe that Arroyo cheated in the last elections. Pieces of evidence have been presented by the Opposition but these were set aside by Arroyo's allies in Congress during the congressional canvassing. The Presidential Electoral Tribunal on the other hand junked the electoral protest after the death of Fernando Poe Jr.

The taped conversations are a damning evidence of massive fraud. Presidential Spokesperson Ignacio Bunye earlier confirmed it was the President's voice which was recorded on the tapes. Later, Bunye retracted his statement saying he might be wrong. This flip-flopping stance only fuelled public suspicion. Despite appeals from the public, Arroyo to this day has neither confirmed nor denied the recorded voice as her own.

On June 10, Atty. Samuel Ong, former deputy director of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), came out with the "mother of all tapes." He disclosed that the Intelligence Services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) had put the Opposition candidates and Comelec officials under surveillance. It is in this process that ISAFP managed to bug Arroyo's phone calls to Garcillano.

Malacañang launched a pre-emptive strike on the brewing scandal by releasing two versions of the tape, one the "original" and the other "altered." But with Ong coming out with the master tape, Malacañang defense has suddenly become hardly believable.

In its desperate attempt to quash the scandal, the Arroyo government has used intimidation and harassment. Charges of inciting to sedition have been filed against Ong. NBI Chief Reynaldo Wycoco was quick to malign Ong's reputation to discredit the latter. The San Carlos Seminary where Ong sought refuge for three days was surrounded with heavy police and military deployment.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales went as far as threatening the media of violating the anti-wiretapping law should the tapes be aired. In a memorandum, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) banned the playing of the tapes, threatening violators with sanctions.

Malacañang has also put pressure on Isafp agent T/Sgt. Vidal Doble. Doble admitted he was one of those who bugged Garcillano and was the one who handed the master copy to Ong. After the military took custody of him in a somewhat staged rescue attempt, Doble retracted his statements. The incident is no different from Mike Defensor's daring "rescue" of Udong Mahusay, star-witness to the Jose Pidal case. Mahusay also retracted all his statements vs Mike Arroyo.

Arroyo is not out of the woods yet. Malacañang's maneuvers will never succeed as the people continue to seek out the truth. Some independent analysts have already confirmed that Arroyo was the female voice in the tapes. Electoral fraud is definitely a bigger crime than wiretapping. The truth behind the tapes is of primary public concern.

Corruption and Other Scandals

The First Family has long been involved in a series of controversies. These include the Jose Pidal account and later, the jueteng payola. Since Arroyo assumed power, her government has been tainted with corruption cases such as the IMPSA deal, undeclared assets in the U.S., overpriced Macapagal Boulevard, the use of public funds for her presidential campaign, among others. The public was also shocked with Mike Arroyo's stay at an expensive suite in Las Vegas last year.

Recently, witnesses at the Senate hearings on the jueteng tagged Jose Miguel 'Mikey' Arroyo and Ignacio 'Iggy' Arroyo as among the beneficiaries of huge pay-offs. These statements from alleged jueteng bagmen were supported by anti-jueteng crusader Archbishop Oscar Cruz of Lingayen, Pangasinan.

Arroyo has embarked on a public relations offensive, saying that she will have members of the First Family investigated and that no one was above the law. But even the leave of absence of Mikey Arroyo failed to appease public criticism over Arroyo's misrule and bad governance. It is of course very unlikely that Arroyo does not know the extent of the activities of her family.

Creeping Martial Law

Arroyo has unleashed fascist terror on the people, following the lead of the US-led "war on terror". Militarization and U.S. armed intervention have intensified. Taking the cue from the U.S. government, the Arroyo government virtually sabotaged the peace talks, escalated its military operations and pushed for the enactment of laws curtailing civil liberties such as the National ID System and the Anti-Terrorism Bill.

Arroyo's record of human rights violations have been widely condemned even by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Extra-judicial killings, abductions and forced evacuations are constantly perpetrated by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

Critics are branded as enemies of the state and/or as destabilizers. Those who call for Arroyo's resignation are threatened with charges of sedition. The violent dispersals of otherwise peaceful protest actions continue as the police enforces the "no permit, no rally" policy.

The Arroyo government is also using the NTC and the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board to suppress press freedom. In a memorandum issued last month, the MTRCB ordered public affairs programs and news documentaries to submit their materials for review and approval prior to telecast.

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The Arroyo government cannot suppress the truth, much more the people's outrage. Arroyo's fascism only exposes her paranoia and desperation. The Filipino people are ready to confront repression with vigilance and militancy.

Time to go for Arroyo

The Filipino people can no longer endure another five years of the Arroyo government. Four years of suffering is already too much. It is high time that the people punish the regime for electoral fraud, corruption, anti-people policies, puppetry to U.S. interests and intensifying repression.

Some lawmakers are considering filing an impeachment case against Arroyo. If handled properly, this could be a venue to further expose the rottenness of the Arroyo government.

It is a positive development that retired and active military officers are also calling for her resignation. However, they must stand with the people and uphold civilian supremacy at all times. A coup d'état that will place a civilian-military junta in power is unacceptable.

At the end of the day, it is the mass movement which will prove decisive in defeating the bankrupt Arroyo regime. As we have learned from our experiences as far back as the US-Marcos dictatorship and just recently during the Estrada regime, the people's collective action is crucial in achieving reforms for our country.

The people's struggle to oust the Arroyo regime must not result in just a change of leadership. There should also be substantial reforms that will benefit the people, especially the toiling masses.

A "transition council," composed of various major political forces, may be formed to carry out reforms. The representation in the council of democratic, patriotic and progressive forces is vital in carrying out nationalist and pro-people reforms such as industrialization, land reform, wage increases, resumption of the peace process, improving social services and the like.

The transition or interim council will also pave the way for the election of a new leadership.

Based on our previous experience, the constitutional succession to the presidency will no longer be enough. Vice President Noli de Castro, like Arroyo, assumed office under questionable circumstances.

Genuine changes could not be achieved by a mere change of presidents. However, the movement to oust Arroyo could be a time for the people's movement to gain strength on its way to changing the system. The people must continuously strive in building a truly just, humane and progressive society.

What we can do:

1. Stay informed and spread the news. Organize discussions, mass meetings, fora, teach-ins, prayer gatherings and other activities that will inform the people on the current crisis.
2. Initiate sectoral, multi-sectoral, local, provincial and regional protest actions on the various issues confronting the people. Intensify the calls for the resignation or ouster of the Arroyo regime.
3. Wear pins, ribbons, stickers so that your views can be known. Send text messages and emails too. Air your views and opinions on radio, TV and print. Uphold freedom of expression and frustrate any attempt to silence the people's protest.
4. Write to your congressmen and senators to withdraw their support for the Arroyo administration.
5. Print statements, pamphlets, letters to the editor and other reading materials. Propagate jingles and songs of protest.
6. Join the growing movement of people seeking a change in leadership and a change in the system. Get organized! Be a member of an organization and get others to join in as well.



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