

■ By Ezra Zara

THOSE of us who are thirty and above saw how the whole nation sang, danced, and laughed as the dictatorship crumbled at the people's victory at Edsa 20 years ago. After that, we witnessed how our democratic institutions rose from among the rubbles. We felt so free, hopeful, and invincible then.

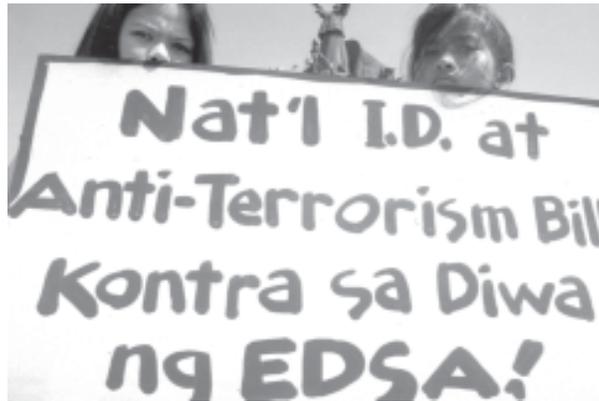
'RUSH' I.D. SYSTEM

But now, under the aegis of the war on terrorism, what democratic freedoms we have achieved as a people through decades of struggle, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo might nullify in a few month's time, armed with the Executive Order 420. The proposed National ID System (NIS) had been approved too quickly and launched unceremoniously, but its possible toll on our basic rights and liberties could be devastating and enduring.

The reasons why we should have a national ID and how it should be implemented are still unclear. What is clear by now is the emergence of a global "anti-terror" regime led by the US and embraced by member-countries of the "coalition-of-the-willing" — RP included.

The NIS is hardly a solitary and honest initiative by government to ease up the troublesome lives of Filipinos whose wallets bulge, not with money, but with numerous IDs for various transactions. It is part of a global plan of the mighty and paranoid states realizing that terrorism is a necessary consequence of their global tyrannical policies.

One super-ID for all transactions to be done by Juan dela Cruz is desirable. But using the same ID to hunt down "terrorists" and perceived "enemies of the state" is abominable and dangerous. The



Members of a militant group protest against the National ID system at EDSA. JOJO PANSA

latter, however, is the most likely reason for the "rush-ID" system's approval.

If so, one thing is certain: The infrastructures of monitoring every citizen's movements from place to place, one's past and present addresses, persons one having associations with, and a host of vital information every individual would rather keep within himself, is now being worked out — everyone remains clueless, except those most trusted by Malacanang.

Quoted intentions

President Arroyo has stated that the NIS is one of the "key elements" in the fight against terrorism.

But there is also one "socially acceptable" purpose floated around by NIS apologists (as an

after thought?); The NIS is nothing more than a way to facilitate government transactions and to speed up business.

Yet, more quotes add up to the cacophony of "official voices" confusing everybody about the real intention of the ID system. Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye had been quoted as saying, "under the proposed ID system everyone is presumed a suspect." Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes has hinted the NIS is a move to "make Filipinos' lives easier" and only those who have something to hide could possibly oppose it.

Critics oppose the ID system, especially after hearing the declaration of Secretary Bunye. They argue that abusive lawmen could do "illegal shortcuts" with





the ID system; that the ID could be used to restrict freedom of movement and; loss of this "super ID" could deprive citizens of their rights to access services. Lastly, it is like a "big brother" measure whose real intent is to spy on an individual or group's activities.

Like it or not, the national ID system is in place. There is already a standing order to consolidate individual information from the BIR, SSS, GSIS, LTO, and other government agencies. Before long, profiling of individuals would be possible with much ease using computer technology. With the NIS, who could escape from the watchful eyes of the state and the few whose interests the state represents?

The MATRIX

The special report of the Focus of the Global South on NIS post some questions like how would the NIS catch "terrorists?" The report ventures into an answer: The MATRIX (or Multi-State Terrorism Information Exchange) project the US is operating would do all the magic for RP.

The report says that the MATRIX is a massive database that contains millions of personal information, including physical features, ethnicity, current and past addresses, phone numbers, among others. The report continues: the MATRIX includes not only personal information from the five states that are pilot testing the database but also information culled from many other databases from other states. It is maintained by a private company, Seisint, Inc. and partly funded by the US Department of Justice.

It is most likely that the template for the information gathered by the Philippine NIS is the same with that of the MATRIX. And since RP is part of the "coalition of the willing" in fighting international terrorism, global sharing of RP citizens' individual information is possible—RP database would be open to global data sharing for sure.

Guilty unless proven innocent

With this hi-tech system, it seems no one could escape the eyes of the "gods"—those who control and have access to the MATRIX. In the same way, the "lesser gods" in RP—those running the state—would have full access to all the individual information of every holder of the super-ID. Those who don't have an ID would be automatically tagged a suspect and therefore an outcast or even dragged into prison (or even into shallow graves).

Operators of the MATRIX in the US have allegedly formulated a "terrorism quotient" (TQ) based on the information they gathered on individuals being lodged in the database. If RP NIS database copied the template from the US and used the same TQ to determine whether a person is a security "high-risk", what could it mean to us?

Presuming that everybody is a suspect in the government's frantic hunt for terrorists, as Bunye has hinted above, everyone would then be guilty unless proven innocent. All the information gathered by concerned government agents and agencies on an individual are secrets not even the "suspect" would know. And if they (those operating the system) would find on the records that one has "high terrorism quotient", then one is doomed because the system holds "secret evidences" denied to anyone who would want to know except those allowed by the state.

The database and the system of analyzing data are not 100 percent errors-proof due to human factors and system slips-up. In such case, how would one accused of being a terrorist defend oneself? Who would stand as witness for the accused? In a reverse legal sense, it is now the guilty that has the burden of proving that he is innocent, while totally blind of the dossiers that the state possesses against him. If we are to think about civil liberties in the context of an NIS regime, forget about it. ■