

P10-M shabu found in ex-Marawi mayor's house

By JAIME LAUDE

Government troops yesterday recovered two kilos of shabu worth P10 million from a house owned by the former mayor of Marawi City.

The troops, along with policemen, were conducting clearing operations in Marawi City when they stumbled upon the two kilos of illegal drugs stashed in the abandoned house of Omar

Solitario Ali.

Ali was not around when troops and policemen searched his house that was reportedly used by Maute gunmen as a safehouse.

Ali was included in the

arrest order issued by the Department of National Defense as implementer of martial law. He was also named by President Duterte as among the "narco politicians" involved in illegal drugs.

His younger brother Fahad Salic, also a former mayor of the city, was included in the list and was charged with rebellion for supporting the Islamic State-linked Maute group that laid siege on Marawi City for

almost a month.

Officials said the discovery had bolstered suspicions that the militants were using illegal drugs in their suicidal attempts to fight government forces.

Troops From Page 1

of the tunnels is an indication that the gunmen are getting desperate and their fight is coming to an end.

"Their tipping point is nearing," he said.

With bombproof tunnels, anti-tank weapons hidden in mosques, human shields and familiarity with the terrain, the Maute gunmen are proving a far tougher opponent than the military had expected.

The roughly 10 percent of Marawi held by the militants has many tunnels and basements that can withstand 500-pound (227-kilo) bombs, military spokesman Lt. Colonel Jo-Ar Herrera said earlier.

He said even mosques in the city have tunnels used by the militants to escape bombing runs as well as to store high-powered weapons.

The military air strikes have spared mosques and Islamic schools known as madrassas, a limitation exploited by the militants.

Residents had built reinforced bunkers and tunnels underneath their houses after a 1970 Muslim uprising led to large parts of the city

being razed.

As the fighting in Marawi entered its fifth week, the Maute numbers continued to dwindle against the military's superior firepower.

A month ago, about 500 gunmen led by brothers Omar and Abdullah Maute, along with several foreign fighters, stormed into Marawi City.

The fighting in Marawi forced President Duterte to place the entire Mindanao under martial law.

Troops since then have killed about 280 gunmen, recovered nearly 300 assault firearms and regained control of 85 buildings. Many of the high-rise buildings were used as sniper posts to slow down the advance of government forces, the military said.

At least 69 soldiers and policemen and 26 civilians have also perished in the fighting.

Of the 19 out of 96 villages across the lakeside city of 200,000 people that the black flag-waving militants occupied, only four villages remain under their control, according to Armed Forces chief Gen. Eduardo Año.

"They are constricted in a very small area. They're pinned down," Año said.

He said three boatloads of gunmen who tried to join the Maute militants were blasted by navy gunboats three days ago in Lanao Lake, which borders Marawi.

The gunmen may have either been militants repositioning from nearby areas or rebel reinforcements from elsewhere, he said.

Galvez added the militants were resorting to using their civilian hostages as "dummy" fighters.

"The terrorists are forcing to arm their hostages to make it appear they still have the numbers and at the same time confuse the soldiers in engaging the terrorists," Galvez said.

Galvez gave assurance the troops have been trained to discriminate and distinguish their targets.

Año said the battle in Marawi was taking longer than usual because the militants were using civilians as human shields and had no qualms destroying an entire city and killing anyone in their path.

"We can just bomb them away or use napalm bomb to burn everything, but

then, we will not be any different from them if we do that," he said.

Opposition lawmaker Al-bay Rep. Edcel Lagman decried the "mounting deaths and destruction in Marawi City," which he said are the result of President Duterte's declaration of martial law and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.

"Thirty days of martial law in Marawi City and the rest of Mindanao have aggravated the situation in Marawi City to inordinately horrific and miserable proportions," Lagman said.

"All of this horror and misery after the declaration of martial law could have been avoided if the President did not precipitately and unwarrantedly declare martial law and the suspend the writ which gave the armed forces and police authorities the unnecessary impetus to implement military rule with disastrous consequences," he said.

Lagman said the rising number of casualties, extensive damage to private properties and displacement of civilians "were the results of the excessive military offensive through airstrikes and land assaults."

— With AP, Jess Diaz

Omar From Page 1

idea where Mahmud was buried and troops are trying to locate the exact spot with the help of civilians to recover the remains and validate the intelligence received.

One of the local militant leaders, Omarhayam Maute, also is believed to have been killed in the early days of intense fighting, he said.

Año, citing intelligence shared by foreign counterparts, said Mahmud was suspected of channeling more than P30 million to the IS-inspired Maute group to acquire firearms, food and other supplies for the attack.

A former Malaysian university professor who later turned jihadi and received training in Afghanistan, Mahmud appeared in a video showing militant leaders planning the Marawi siege in a hideout, a sign of his key role in the uprising. A copy of the video was seized by Filipino troops in a hideout on May 23.

Malaysian security officials have also received information of Mahmud's killing in Marawi and were trying to confirm it.

Task Force Marawi spokesman Lt. Col. Jo-Ar Herrera stressed they have yet to con-

firm Mahmud's killing.

"No confirmation yet. We received also some unvalidated reports," Herrera said in a text message.

Two other leaders of the uprising, Abu Sayyaf leader Isnlon Hapilon and Maute's brother Abdullah, were still with other gunmen fighting in Marawi, Año added.

The military's Western Mindanao Command chief Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. said they also received reports that Omar Maute and another brother Madi have been killed.

He said the information that the Maute brothers were killed by government troops was "very likely."

Armed Forces Public Affairs Office chief Col. Edgard Arevalo said if Omar was killed during the bombing, it would be difficult for the military to recover his remains and officially confirm his death.

"We are still validating this. We have the report last week, but we could not just confirm this because if indeed he was killed in an airstrike, his body could have been blown to pieces," he said. — AP, Roel Pareño, Jaime Laude

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Cropital connects farmers, investors for the future of Phl agriculture

By HELEN FLORES

Doing good comes with great rewards. This is the philosophy that keeps Cropital, a crowdfunding platform put up by a group of Filipino millennials to help local farmers, running.

Since it was launched in November 2015, Cropital has provided financial support to around 360 farmers across the Philippines, says 24-year-old Rachel de Villa, the organization's co-founder and chief technology officer.

"Cropital was born out of a need to support smallholder farmers by providing them with services that empower them, improve their productivity, and ultimately increase their income," de Villa says. "This is made possible by the growing global network of the Cropital community who came from all walks of life and are willing to give their hard-earned money to support our farmers," she says.

The enterprise enables low-cost, sustainable agricultural investments to support farmers, thereby promoting inclusive growth, reducing poverty and ensuring food security.

"More than the funding, Cropital also helps farmers reduce the risks in farming and improve productivity by processing crop insurance, providing a buyer and giving trainings and access to technology partners," de Villa says.

'GROW MONEY BY HELPING FARMERS'

At Cropital, people can choose from a list of farms where they would like to invest their money. Cropital manages the fund for the farmers, making sure they get the resources they need, and investors receive their return on investment once the produce has been sold.

To date, Cropital has raised US\$120,000 worth in investment, de Villa says.

The enterprise is globally recognized and supported by various organizations in the Philippines and abroad, including the US, Netherlands,



and Malaysia.

"For the farm investors, Cropital is a social impact investment wherein you help our farmers and at the same time, you earn for your future. We give you an alternative medium for investment with faster and higher return of money to add to your source of income for living," de Villa says.

The amount of investment is from P5,000 to as high as P50,000.

The rate of return for users, on the other hand, ranges from three to 30 percent in less than six months.

Cropital was awarded Philippine Social Enterprise of the Year at the Philippine Rice Bowl Startup Awards 2016.

De Villa was included in *Forbes Magazine's* 30 Under 30 entrepreneurs in the Finance and Venture category last year.

According to de Villa, Cropital is committed to provide sustainable and low-cost financing to local farmers and provide linkage and added value services to enable an increase in productivity through the latest innovations and technology.

"The core of what we're trying to do is to improve the income and productivity of our farmers through crowdfunding," she says. "Cropital is where agriculture meets technology and financing," she points out.

Cropital, de Villa explains, works on a simple formula – capital + resources for productivity = sustainable income for local farmers.

De Villa laments that Fili-

pino farmers perennially live in debt, and that they are regularly taken advantage of by traders.

"Traditionally, farmers needed to approach informal lenders and loan sharks to get the capital they needed to start a farming cycle. This made them profit less due to high interest rates of as high as 30 percent per month," she says.

"With Cropital, farmers get paid for labor and at the same time take majority of the profit – significantly better than other lenders, hence their great reception," de Villa says.

Most Filipino farmers suffer losses from climate issues. The country experiences at least 20 storms a year and global warming has made climate patterns erratic.

Local farmers, de Villa notes, are also getting old. Their average age is 57. "With no interest from the younger generations to join the farming workforce, we'd lose our farmers in 10 to 15 years' time. This reality of agriculture is unacceptable and Cropital exists to solve these problems," she says.

Impressed with what the group has accomplished in such a short time, Teresa Ganzon of Bangko Kabayan, a microfinance institution founded in 1957 in Ibaan, Batangas, Philippines, said people on the ground must ensure that farmers receive the resources they need and farmers do their part and utilize these resources productively to ensure the sustainability of the program.

"More than the platform on

which the money flows in from the general public, the great challenge is in administering it on the ground," she says.

Ganzon does not encourage the proliferation of crowdfunding schemes in the Philippines.

"I would not want to see a proliferation of crowdfunding schemes to the point that the public gets tired of it and no longer supports the proposals. However, similar innovative and digital-based services would certainly be welcome in both the field of banking and agriculture," she says.

PLANS

Cropital seeks to scale-up its business model rapidly across all provinces in the Philippines, providing jobs and improving the lives of thousands of farmers in the next years.

De Villa says Cropital aims to expand its operations in Southeast Asia, providing financing and agricultural services and support, thus improving food security for certain countries in ASEAN.

The company aims to support hundreds of thousands of local farmers by matching them with established contract buyers, and provide efficient production systems, as well as weather resilience technology.

"We believe that agriculture is our country's job creation engine. By giving our farmers the support that they need to reach their full potential, only then will our country be truly rich," she says.

<https://www.cropital.com>

Today, for Impact Journalism Day, 50 newspapers join forces to highlight stories that change the world.



By CHRISTIAN DE BOISREDON

Beyond the constant stream of negative news, there are many stories of hope and concrete solutions. Stories of changemakers tackling some of the world's most pressing issues with innovative ideas, in order to change the lives of millions for the better. Stories worth reading and spreading, not only to rebalance our view of the world, but to help these existing solutions be replicated worldwide.

The media can play a crucial role in telling the individual stories behind this global movement. That's why for the last five years, Sparknews has invited newspapers to take part in Impact Journalism Day, harnessing the power of collaborative journalism to bring stories of change to the surface.

Every year these newspapers explore and publish an array of groundbreaking solutions in special supplements on the same day, reaching 120 million people worldwide in print and digital media. Many publications have come to realize the impact of these articles, and now incorporate more solutions-driven stories into their day-to-day coverage of the world.

For the fifth edition of Impact Journalism Day, the media are joined by organizations that believe spreading these stories is a first step toward change. These include the United Nations as well as One Young World, which annually gathers together 1,500 young leaders from social and corporate sectors who are involved in positive innovations. A large community of well-known personalities and ordinary citizens have also joined the chorus in signing a manifesto to show that everyone – governments, the private sector, civil society, NGOs and everyday people – can take action for a better future. You, too, can be part of this transformational movement.

Discover those who have successfully brought answers to challenges such as good health, access to water, quality education, decent employment and clean energy. Each serves as a concrete example of the power of individual or group initiatives to help reach the UN New Sustainable Development Goals, to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity and good health for all.

We hope you enjoy the read... and that you become part of the solution. Sign the manifesto (sharestoriesofchange.org) and share the stories that impress you most on Facebook and Twitter (#ImpactJournalism, #StoryOfChange, @Sparknews, @PhilippineStar).

Christian de Boisredon, founder of Sparknews and Ashoka Fellow & The Sparknews Team.

FLOAT PHILIPPINES Towards a safer aquatic environment

By JANVIC MATEO

With over 7,000 islands situated in the tropics of the Pacific, the Philippines boasts of having some of the best beaches in the world.

Corollarily, the country also ranks high in terms of number of people – especially children – who die due to drowning.

A recent study released by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that an average of 2,496 people die in the Philippines due to drowning every year between 1980 and 2011. While the government is implementing various initiatives to address the issue, there is no denying that much remains to be done.

This is why in 2015, a group of Australian students from Griffith University decided to come up with a drowning prevention program that will be implemented in various coastlines across the Philippines.

"We hope that after the implementation of this program, lives will be saved on the local beaches," says Andrew McLean, directing manager of FLOAT Philippines.

LOAT Philippines is an initiative that aims to harness engagement

between international and local organizations – including the government – to come up with strategies that will reduce the drowning mortality in the Philippines.

"Drowning prevention programs are commonplace in Australia and we grow up feeling safe when we are at the beach, both as a result of our swimming culture and the incredible joy our surf lifesavers do patrolling the beach," adds McLean.

The primary idea is to come up with a sustainable program that will raise drowning prevention awareness among those living in coastline communities. The organization envisions to implement "learn to swim" and "surf lifesaving" programs in the country to lower cases of drowning, particularly in tourist spots.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Almost two years since they came up with the initial idea, McLean admits challenges in implementing a project in a location thousands of miles from where they are based.

The group remains committed, however. According to local coordinator Kina Santillan Pascua, the project is nearing implementation.

A former coordinator for the Australian embassy, Pascua said she sees the importance of a drowning preven-

tion program in the Philippines.

"Everywhere I go, I see a lot of communities with kids playing near shorelines. It's their backyard and we have to implement programs that will make their environment safer," she says.

Following a second visit in July 2016, FLOAT formed partnerships with Zambles Surf Life Saving Inc. and popular tourist hotel Charlie Does Inn in Baler. Both organizations are committed to training lifeguards and to developing anti-drowning initiatives.

"FLOAT managed to raise the funds to train two Baler locals as lifesavers and our partners in Baler are currently trying to get a law passed by the government in hopes of securing funds for future employment and training of the surf lifesavers," says McLean.

The organization also hopes to strengthen ties between Australia and the Philippines, and therefore further increase awareness of the project by meeting both the Australian and the Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce Philippines, both situated in Manila.

SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM

While the long-term objective is to promote a culture of safer aquatic



Australian students from Griffith University behind FLOAT Philippines, a program that aims to raise drowning prevention awareness among those living in coastline communities in the country.

spaces in the entire Philippines, the team behind the projects understands that they have to limit their program to make it sustainable and scalable.

"We hope to ensure sustainability through training and developing skills of the local organizations we are working with. In addition to this, we want to provide local and international partnerships to these organizations running the project from the ground to boost their knowledge and capabilities in the drowning prevention field," says McLean.

LOAT's pilot project will be based in Baler, but the team hopes that in the long term, they will be able to provide surf lifesaving training across the Aurora Province.

"For the 'learn to swim' project,

we are hoping to partner with Baler Central Primary School to create a sustainable swimming program... By doing this, we hope to extend the current learn to swim teachers expertise and allow them to reach more swimmers," notes McLean.

Much still needs to be done to address the problem of drowning in the Philippines. But for these Australian students, distance – and the difference in nationality and culture – is not going to be a hindrance to ensure that Filipino children are safe in the water.

"We think that everyone should have the ability to learn to swim and enjoy an aquatic environment," ends McLean.

<https://www.gofundme.com/float-philippines>