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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **PBBM vows swift rehab of storm-hit shelters in Cagayan**

**BY MANILA BULLETIN**

Dec 22, 2024 09:28 PM

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on November 10, 2024, assured the government would immediately reconstruct houses damaged by Typhoon Marce in Cagayan.



In his speech during the distribution of financial aid in Buguey, Cagayan, President Marcos said he brought all relevant government agencies to ensure all help is extended to those rendered homeless by Marce.

“Hindi kaya ng isang department gawin lahat. Kaya ang tinatawag po namin, ginagawa po namin ay what we call the whole-of-government approach. Ibig sabihin, lahat ng iba’t ibang departamento kahit papaano ay makakadala ng tulong at makakatulong para mabigyan ng relief, para ma-rescue ang ating mga tauhan, para mabigyan ng relief,” President Marcos said.

“At ngayon, ngayon dito sa Cagayan, ang dapat talaga nating tingnan ay ang reconstruction dahil ‘yung sa... Sa public infrastructure, okay naman, not so bad. Pero ‘yung mga private na tirahan, ‘yun na nga, nasira. Kaya’t ‘yun ang tututukan natin,” he added.



The President said the government will not abandon victims until they fully recover from the typhoon's effects. He said the aid provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will continue.

President Marcos handed over PhP10 million each to the municipalities of Aparri, Buguey, Sanchez-Mira, Santa Teresita, Baggao, Gattaran, Gonzaga, and Santa Ana. The funds were received by their respective local chief executives.

He also witnessed the distribution of assistance from different government agencies — the DSWD, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), and the Department of Agriculture (DA).



<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/22/pbbm-vows-swift-rehab-of-storm-hit-shelters-in-cagayan>

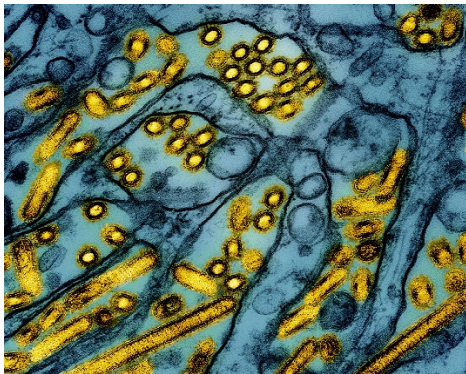
**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# California declared an emergency over bird flu. How serious is the situation?

**BY ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Dec 22, 2024 08:18 AM

California officials have declared a state of emergency over the spread of bird flu, which is tearing through dairy cows in that state and causing sporadic illnesses in people in the U.S.



**FILE -This colorized electron microscope image released by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases on March 26, 2024, shows avian influenza A H5N1 virus particles (yellow), grown in Madin-Darby Canine Kidney (MDCK) epithelial cells (blue). (CDC/NIAID via AP, File)**

That raises new questions about the virus, which has spread for years in wild birds, commercial poultry and many mammal species.

The virus, also known as Type A H5N1, was detected for the first time in U.S. dairy cattle in March. Since then, bird flu has been confirmed in at least 866 herds in 16 states.

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More than 60 people in eight states have been infected, with mostly mild illnesses, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. One person in Louisiana has been hospitalized with the nation's first known severe illness caused by the virus, health officials said this week.

Here's what you need to know.

## **Why did California declare a state of emergency?**

Gov. Gavin Newsom said he declared the state of emergency to better position state staff and supplies to respond to the outbreak.

California has been looking for bird flu in large milk tanks during processing. And they have found the virus in at least 650 herds, representing about three-quarters of all affected U.S. dairy herds.

The virus was recently detected in Southern California dairy farms after being found in the state's Central Valley since August.

"This proclamation is a targeted action to ensure government agencies have the resources and flexibility they need to respond quickly to this outbreak," Newsom said in a statement.

### **What's the risk to the general public?**

Officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stressed again this week that the virus poses low risk to the general public.

Importantly, there are no reports of person-to-person transmission and no signs that the virus has changed to spread more easily among humans.

In general, flu experts agreed with that assessment, saying it's too soon to tell what trajectory the outbreak could take.

"The entirely unsatisfactory answer is going to be: I don't think we know yet," said Richard Webby, an influenza expert at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

But virus experts are wary because flu viruses are constantly mutating and small genetic changes could change the outlook.

### **Are cases becoming more serious?**

This week, health officials confirmed the first known case of severe illness in the U.S. All the previous U.S. cases — there have been about 60 — were generally mild.

The patient in Louisiana, who is older than 65 and had underlying medical problems, is in critical condition. Few details have been released, but officials said the person developed severe respiratory symptoms after exposure to a backyard flock of sick birds.

That makes it the first confirmed U.S. infection tied to backyard birds, the CDC said.

Tests showed that the strain that caused the person's illness is one found in wild birds, but not in cattle. Last month, health officials in Canada reported that a teen in British Columbia was hospitalized with a severe case of bird flu, also with the virus strain found in wild birds.

Previous infections in the U.S. have been almost all in farmworkers with direct exposure to infected dairy cattle or poultry. In two cases — an adult in Missouri and a child in California — health officials have not determined how they caught it.

It's possible that as more people become infected, more severe illnesses will occur, said Angela Rasmussen, a virus expert at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada.

Worldwide, nearly 1,000 cases of illnesses caused by H5N1 have been reported since 2003, and more than half of people infected have died, according to the World Health Organization.

"I assume that every H5N1 virus has the potential to be very severe and deadly," Rasmussen said.

### **How can people protect themselves?**

People who have contact with dairy cows or commercial poultry or with backyard birds are at higher risk and should use precautions including respiratory and eye protection and gloves, CDC and other experts said.

"If birds are beginning to appear ill or die, they should be very careful about how they handle those animals," said Michael Osterholm, a public health expert at the University of Minnesota.

The CDC has paid for flu shots to protect farmworkers against seasonal flu — and against the risk that the workers could become infected with two flu types at the same time, potentially allowing the bird flu virus to mutate and become more dangerous. The government also said that farmworkers who come in close contact with infected animals should be tested and offered antiviral drugs even if they show no symptoms.

### **How else is bird flu being spread?**

In addition to direct contact with farm animals and wild birds, the H5N1 virus can be spread in raw milk. Pasteurized milk is safe to drink, because the heat treatment kills the virus, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

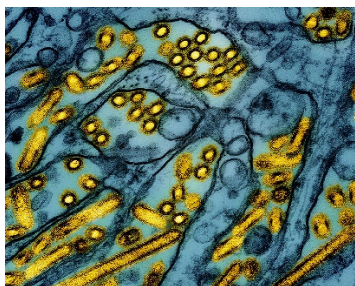
But high levels of the virus have been found in unpasteurized milk. And raw milk sold in stores in California was recalled in recent weeks after the virus was detected at farms and in the products.

In Los Angeles, county officials reported that two indoor cats that were fed the recalled raw milk died from bird flu infections. Officials were investigating additional reports of sick cats.

Health officials urge people to avoid drinking raw milk, which can spread a host of germs in addition to bird flu.

The U.S. Agriculture Department has stepped up testing of raw milk across the country to help detect and contain the outbreak. A federal order issued this month requires testing, which began this week in 13 states.

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<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/22/california-declared-an-emergency-over-bird-flu-how-serious-is-the-situation>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# DA, OceanX partner for marine research, sustainability

[Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas](#) - The Philippine Star

December 22, 2024 | 12:00am



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (right) enters into a partnership with OceanX co-chief executive officer Mark Dalio on Dec. 3, 2024. The Department of Agriculture (DA) on December 20, 2024

Department of Agriculture

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) has partnered with global ocean exploration non-profit OceanX to advance exploration and assessment of the health of the country’s fisheries resources.

The DA and OceanX signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to enable the latter to assess the health and diversity of fisheries, and therefore marine food resources of Philippine seas using its state-of-the-art research vessel, OceanXplorer.

The MOU marks a significant step toward strengthening collaborative efforts to deepen the understanding and preservation of the world’s oceans, according to the DA.

Under the agreement, the two parties will work together to advance shared goals of improving the study, protection and sustainable development of marine ecosystems.

The collaboration, the DA said, is expected to bring cutting-edge scientific exploration to the country, with an emphasis on characterizing the Philippines’ rich marine ecology.

“The data we gather will provide invaluable insights into our marine resources, our vast coastline, and the unique biodiversity we hold. It will help us devise better strategies for

preserving and optimizing these resources for future generations,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

OceanX co-CEO Mark Dalio said the partnership would yield long-term impact not only in understanding marine ecosystems but also in supporting the communities that depend on them.

“At OceanX, we believe that cutting-edge technology combined with meaningful collaboration can unlock the mysteries of the ocean and provide actionable insights for sustainable resource management,” Dalio said.

“We look forward to working with the many scientists, policymakers and community stakeholders, aimed to inspire stewardship of the oceans while equipping future generations with the knowledge and tools to ensure their sustainability,” he added.

The DA said the partnership with OceanX aligns with the country’s growing commitment to marine conservation and sustainable resource management.

“By leveraging OceanX’s expertise and technological capabilities, both organizations hope to accelerate the understanding of the Philippines’ vital marine ecosystems, crucial to both local livelihoods and global environmental health,” the agency said.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/12/22/2409013/da-oceanx-partner-marine-research-sustainability>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

## **DA: Prices of Noche Buena items up 5%**

**Romina Cabrera** - The Philippine Star

December 22, 2024 | 12:00am



Vendors attended to their customers buying various food items from their stalls inside the Commonwealth Market in Quezon City on November 22, 2024.

STAR / Miguel De Guzman

MANILA, Philippines — Prices of Noche Buena grocery items have increased by about five percent, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA)’s latest inspections.

Chicken and pork prices have risen due to higher demand during the holidays, the DA noted.

No more price hikes are expected before yearend, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. assured the public.

Tiu Laurel said they are still investigating why rice prices have “stubbornly” remained high, with a P12 premium over expected prices.

“Rice is being sold for P62, but for me, it should be P50 only. I can see a problem with the branding,” he said.

Cheaper rice at around P40 to P45 is being sold by the DA under its Rice-for-All program at select public markets in Metro Manila.

The program has been expanded to four more markets in the capital: the Larangay Public Market and Phase 9 Bagong Silang Market in Caloocan, Cloverleaf Market in Quezon City and New Marulas Public Market in Valenzuela.

Meanwhile, the rice program offering the staple at P29 per kilo has opened new locations at Kamuning Market in Quezon City, Pasay City Public Market and New Las Piñas City Market.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/22/2409089/da-prices-noche-buena-items-5>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# **A secure step forward for Japan-Philippines relations: Strategic overview of the RAA and OSA**

**DIPLOMATIC POUCH - Endo Kazuya - The Philippine Star**

December 22, 2024 | 12:00am

Almost seven decades of friendship and dialogue have made Japan and the Philippines the firmest of partners. Our close cooperation in key areas such as agriculture and transportation has since forged enduring bridges, with the goodwill between our people forming the warm fabric of our relations.

It is safe to say that Japan's part in helping realize the Philippines' potential has grown along with our countries' vibrant friendship and mutual understanding. Lending credence to this sentiment, the National Economic and Development Authority even recorded Japan as one of the top sources of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to the Philippines last year in its latest ODA portfolio review.

Emboldened by our increasing engagements, the "heart-to-heart relations" between our countries have certainly enjoyed a dynamic and much-welcome vigor in recent months.

Today, I have come to write about one of the products of this sterling momentum, namely: the increasing security cooperation between our two countries, which has introduced new depth in our "heart-to-heart" ties.

Adding diversity to our already extensive partnership, renewed security cooperation has emerged to tackle the challenges posed by the present climate of global affairs. This bold step in our rich collaboration highlights the growing significance of security in preserving a stable environment for our bilateral ties to flourish.

Through two vital concepts, the RAA and OSA, Japan has manifested its support for the Philippines' initiatives toward greater security. Having mentioned them, allow me to give a brief sketch of the pivotal role these humble acronyms play in shaping our bilateral relations as strategic partners.

## **RAA (Reciprocal Access Agreement)**

Signed during our 2nd "2+2" Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting, the RAA was one of the fruitful outcomes during the exchange between our countries' most senior foreign and defense authorities in July of this year.

The Reciprocal Access Agreement or RAA is an agreement which would allow for more extensive cooperation through the establishment of procedures for mutually determined activities between our visiting defense forces.

Promoting greater interoperability between our two forces, the RAA enables closer exercises and cooperative activities, improving capabilities in key areas including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

Furthermore, the RAA allows for more shared opportunities for Japan and the Philippines to participate in more comprehensive defense exercises with common security partners such as the United States and Australia.

Also signifying a historic milestone in our bilateral relationship, the RAA would be the first defense agreement of its kind Japan would have with an Asian country.

I am very pleased to note that the honorable Philippine Senate concurred in the ratification of the RAA with unanimous votes of support on Dec. 16, despite the tight schedule.

It is my strong hope that once the RAA comes into force it will bring us closer to an even more coordinated approach to safeguarding regional stability.

### **OSA (Official Security Assistance)**

Established in 2023, Official Security Assistance, or OSA, is Japan's new grant aid cooperation framework that seeks to improve its partners' defense capabilities through beneficial assistance to their armed forces and other pertinent defense organizations.

In contrast to Japan's ODA, OSA deals primarily with reinforcing the Philippines' security and defense capabilities through the provision of key equipment and supplies.

OSA extends to capacity building in peacekeeping operations as well as humanitarian activities – support to disaster response and search and rescue operations, to name a few.

Given the context of the country's close proximity to important sea lanes, including the Luzon Strait and the South China Sea, OSA can also play a significant part in revitalizing the Philippines' maritime defense capabilities and brightening prospects for enhanced national and regional security.

Last Dec. 5, 2024, Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary H.E. Enrique Manalo and I exchanged and signed notes on a 1.6 billion-yen OSA Project for FY (Fiscal Year) 2024, with the presence of Secretary of National Defense H.E. Gilberto Teodoro, which details comprehensive support. This includes the provision of rigid-hulled inflatable boats, coastal radar systems and automatic identification systems for C-90 aircraft to the Philippine Navy, as well as air surveillance radar system equipment for the Philippine Air Force. All of which are set to greatly contribute to the country's maritime domain awareness and surveillance capabilities.

The Philippines was the first OSA recipient and the only one for two consecutive years. In order to support the Philippines in the face of strategic challenges, Japan will continue to actively consider the use of OSA, while taking into account the Philippines' needs.

## **Towards a secure future**

From the construction of Metro Manila's first subway system to promoting processes for peace in Mindanao, Japan has been firm at the Philippines' side in supporting and opening avenues for stability and prosperity.

As like-minded democracies, cooperation between the Philippines and Japan remains vital in the preservation of peace and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. With the Philippines fervently bolstering its defense partnerships, Japan remains ever ready to support, as it has in past cooperation with the country.

With each secure and resounding stride, our friendship stands firmer as a testament to the resilience and strength of our democratic and time-tested principles.

Even as we navigate the shifting currents of global affairs, I believe the resolute bond between Japan and the Philippines is one that will remain a heartening constant even in times of uncertainty.

\* \* \*

Endo Kazuya is the Ambassador of Japan to the Philippines.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/22/2409111/secure-step-forward-japan-philippines-relations-strategic-overview-raa-and-osa>



**REMATE:**

# Eroplano ng BFAR sa Chinese Navy: ‘Review your chart!’

December 22, 2024 14:44



MANILA, Philippines – Nakipagsagutan sa pamamagitan ng radio challenge ang 12-seater patrol airplane ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) matapos itong bantaan ng isang Chinese navy ship na may bow No. 500 habang nasa West Philippine Sea.

Ayon sa boses mula sa radio challenge ng China, ang eroplano ng BFAR ay pumasok na sa Chinese “territorial airspace” at dapat na “leave immediately [to] avoid misunderstanding.”

Inulit pa ng 40 beses ang radio challenge sa loob ng tatlong oras na paglipad ng BFAR.

Sa kabila nito, hindi natinag ang dalawang piloto ng Pilipinas na paulit-ulit din ang nagiging tugon.

Anang BFAR, sila umano ay nagsasagawa lamang ng “a lawful maritime patrol” sa loob ng 370-kilometer (200-nautical-mile) exclusive economic zone (EEZ) ng Pilipinas.

Ang tugon na ito ay sinisegundahan pa ng sagot para sa mga Chinese na, “You are way beyond the 200-nautical-mile EEZ of your country. Please review your chart!”

Ang eroplano ng BFAR ay nasa lugar para suportahan ang isinasagawang misyon ng paghahatid ng mga suplay sa mga mangingisda sa Bajo de Masinloc, kasama ang Philippine Coast Guard. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/eroplano-ng-bfar-sa-chinese-navy-review-your-chart/>

**REMATE:**

# **Pagsibak kay ex-BFAR chief Escoto, tinindigan ng Ombudsman**

December 22, 2024 13:31

MANILA, Philippines – Pinagtibay ng Office of the Ombudsman ang kautusan nitong nagtatanggal sa serbisyo kay dating Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) National Director Demosthenes R. Escoto dahil sa umano’y iregularidad sa paggawad ng P2-bilyong kontrata para sa vessel monitoring system (VMS) project noong 2018.

Naunang kinasuhan ng Ombudsman sina Escoto, dating Agriculture Usec. at BFAR National Director Eduardo B. Gongona, at British national na si Simon Tucker. Nahaharap ang tatlo sa dalawang bilang ng paglabag sa Section 3(e) ng Republic Act 3019 o “Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act” at tig-isang bilang ng paglabag sa Sections 3(g) at 3(j) ng parehong batas.

Sa 8-pahinang joint order na pirmado ni Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires, ibinasura ang mosyon para muling pag-aralan ang kaso ni Escoto kaya nananatili ang naunang resolusyon at desisyon noong Pebrero 5, 2024.

Ayon sa Ombudsman, mahalaga ang ginampanang papel ni Escoto—malaki man o maliit—sa pagpapatupad ng planong nagresulta sa pag-award ng kontrata sa United Kingdom-based SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd. (SRT-UK).

Sinibak si Escoto matapos mapatunayang guilty sa grave misconduct. Dahil dito, itinalaga ni Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. si Isidro Velayo, Jr. bilang officer-in-charge ng BFAR.

Nag-ugat ito sa papel ni Escoto bilang chair ng BFAR Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) kung saan lumitaw ang mga iregularidad at kawalan ng pagsasaalang-alang sa interes ng publiko.

Sa ilalim ng liderato ni Escoto bilang BAC chair, naigawad ang kontrata sa SRT-UK para sa Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring System Project Phase 1 o PHILO Project.

Layunin ng PHILO Project na maprotektahan ang yamang-dagat at labanan ang ilegal na pangingsda sa exclusive economic zone ng bansa, gamit ang VMS para sa mga komersiyal na sasakyang pangdagat na may bigat na higit sa 30 gross tons. Bahagi ng proyekto ang pagbili ng transmitters at transceivers.

Ang proyekto ay dapat pondohan ng P1.6-bilyong utang mula sa French government. Gayunpaman, noong 2017, nang manalo ang SRT-France, subsidiary ng SRT-UK, sa bidding, ito ay nadiskwalipika dahil sa pagiging British-owned at kawalan ng manufacturing facilities sa France.

Nabigo ang kasunduan sa France at noong 2018, nanalo sa panibagong bidding ang SRT-UK, na may mas mataas nang badyet na P2.09 bilyon, na lokal nang pinondohan.

Natuklasan ng Ombudsman na si Escoto, bilang opisyal, ay nagbigay ng “hindi makatuwirang pabor” sa SRT-France at SRT-UK. Kahit diskwalipikado ang SRT-France, pinayagan ito ni Escoto na sumali sa bidding at mapabilang sa post-qualification.

Bagamat kinansela ang kontrata sa SRT-France, itinuring ng Ombudsman na ang mga aksiyon ni Escoto ay labag sa batas at mga panuntunan, dahilan upang maipasa ang kontrata sa SRT-UK na nagresulta sa mas mataas na gastusin para sa pamahalaan.

Sa halip na 3,736 units ng VMS transceivers, inobluga ni Escoto ang gobyerno na bumili ng 5,000 units—isang desisyong pumabor nang husto sa SRT-UK at nagdulot ng malaking pinsala sa kaban ng bayan.

Si Escoto ay maraming beses napatawan ng contempt of court dahil sa patuloy na pagpapatupad ng Fisheries Administrative Order 266 kahit may permanent injunction laban dito ang Regional Trial Court Malabon.

Kaakibat ng dismissal ni Escoto ang mga parusang tulad ng pagkakansela ng civil service eligibility, pag-forfeit ng retirement benefits, panghabambuhay na diskwalipikasyon sa pampublikong opisina, at pagbabawal sa pagkuha ng anumang civil service examination.

Kung hindi maipatutupad ang dismissal dahil sa naunang pag-alis sa serbisyo, papalitan ito ng multang katumbas ng isang taong suweldo na babayaran sa Ombudsman. Ang multa ay maaaring kaltasin mula sa retirement benefits, accrued leave credits o iba pang receivables ni Escoto.

“Itong kasunduan ay labis na nakakasama sa pamahalaan at sobrang paborable sa SRT-UK,” ayon sa Ombudsman. *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/pagsibak-kay-ex-bfar-chief-escoto-tinindigan-ng-ombudsman/>