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OMB upholds graft indictment of ex-DA usec

BY JEFFREY DAMICOG

Dec 29, 2024 02:55 PM

The Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) has upheld its indictment of former Department of Agriculture (DA) undersecretary for fisheries Eduardo B. Gongona over the alleged anomalous 2018 contract for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources' (BFAR) Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring System Project Phase II (PHILO Project).

In a 13-page order, the OMB denied the motions for partial reconsideration filed by Gongona who appealed the OMB's resolution that indicted him for two counts of violating Section 3(e), one count of Section 3(g) and one count of Section 3(j) of Republic Act (RA) 3019, the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

“Succinctly, respondent-movant (Gongona) did not introduce any newly discovered evidence that would materially affect the assailed findings of this office; neither was he able to show any errors of law or irregularities committed therein...,” the OMB said.

“The arguments he has put forth have either been already considered or passed upon in the assailed Resolution, or better ventilated during trial proper than at the preliminary investigation level,” it added. Under the BFAR’s PHILO Project that was supposed to be funded by the French government through a loan grant, vessel monitoring system (VMS) satellite transmitters and transceivers were sought to be purchased and used to monitor fishing vessels operating within and beyond the Philippine exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

One of the requirements set by the French government in the loan agreement was that participants in the bidding process must be companies based in France.

After the first bidding process did not push through due to “an issue concerning the mode of procurement to be used for the Project”, BFAR held a second round of bidding on Dec. 20, 2017 and awarded the contract to SRT-France which was later declared by the French Embassy as unqualified since it was incorporated in France only on Nov. 15, 2017 without manufacturing and engineering facilities as well as having no recorded activities in the European country.

“The records bear evidence belying respondent-movant’s claim that he had no knowledge of the ineligibility of SRT-France and that he merely relied on the evaluation and resolution of the BAC (Bids and Awards Committee) and the TWG (Technical Working Group) endorsing the competence of SRT-France as a qualified bidder,” the OMB said.

“In the narrations contained in his Counter-Affidavit, it appears that as early as the time of bidding, he was already aware of the possible defects in the eligibility of SRT-France,” it added.

The OMB pointed out: "It was respondent-movant who moved for the cancellation of the French Loan for some unknown reason, and in the absence of any intimation from the French Government of its intention to revoke the financial aid."

It also indicated that “he was the one who signed the Notices of Award to SRT-France and SRT-UK.”

“His signature in the contract completes the questionable award of the contract to SRT-UK,” it added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/29/omb-upholds-graft-indictment-of-ex-da-usec>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Marcos forging new path for the Philippines this 2024 with landmark laws

YEARENDER

BY ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

Dec 29, 2024 01:52 PM

AT A GLANCE

- From fortifying the country's maritime sovereignty to revitalizing its defense industry, overhauling tax incentives, and championing education recovery, the landmark laws signed by Marcos this year signal that the Philippines is ready to stand on the global stage while ensuring prosperity and justice at home.

In a year marked by bold decisions and the controversial collapse of a once-formidable alliance, President Marcos enacted laws reflecting his commitment to economic revitalization, social equity, and national security.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. (File photo)

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Marcos this year signal that the Philippines is ready to stand on the global stage while ensuring prosperity and justice at home.

Ahead of the signing of the 2025 National Budget on Dec. 30, here's a quick look at the landmark laws signed by President Marcos this past year.

Maritime Rights and National Security

In a bold move to assert the Philippines' maritime claims, particularly in the disputed South China Sea, Marcos signed the Philippine Maritime Zones Act (Republic Act No. 12064) and the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act (RA 12065) in November.

ADVERTISEMENT

These laws, designed to align domestic legislation with international maritime law, reinforce the country's jurisdictional boundaries and rights. They define the country's maritime zones, including internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf, per the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling.

This legislative action has sparked international dialogue, notably with China, which strongly objected to these laws.

Marcos said that by clearly defining maritime zones and rights, the government could protect Filipino fishermen and strengthen its national defense.

In a parallel effort, President Marcos signed RA 12024, or the Self-Reliant Defense Posture Revitalization Act in October, which aims to reduce dependence on foreign defense imports by promoting local production of military equipment, from small arms to advanced systems. This law likewise seeks to foster innovation in security technology tailored to Filipino needs.

Economic Reforms and Investment Incentives

One of the most pivotal laws signed by President Marcos in 2024 was RA 12066, or the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Act. This legislation, signed in November, reduces corporate income tax rates for registered business enterprises from 25 percent to 20 percent and extends fiscal incentives for strategic investments.

The reform aims to attract foreign investors by offering enhanced deductions and flexible work arrangements, such as permitting up to 50 percent of employees in registered enterprises to work from home while retaining tax benefits.

Meanwhile, President Marcos also signed RA 12023, which imposes a 12-percent value-added tax (VAT) on digital services on Oct 2. This measure enhances the Bureau of Internal Revenue's (BIR) capability to collect taxes from digital transactions.

Social and Educational Advances

On the social and education front, Marcos signed RA 12080, or the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act, this month. It introduces comprehensive mental health support in schools, including establishing counselor positions.

In signing the law, Marcos cited the need to acknowledge the growing need for mental health education and support among the youth, aiming for a more resilient future generation.

In addition, RA 11984, or the Anti-No Permit, No Exam Act, signed in March this year, ensures that financial constraints do not hinder educational opportunities, allowing students to take examinations even without a permit.

In October, President Marcos signed the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act or RA 12028. It establishes a national learning intervention program to help students recover from learning gaps exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The law focuses on essential learning areas, such as reading, mathematics, and science. It offers flexible delivery modes such as face-to-face, online, or blended learning to accommodate diverse learner needs.

Meanwhile, in support of the workers in the movie and television industry, Marcos signed, in May, RA 11996, or the Eddie Garcia Law which provides for the implementation of work hours, wages and other wage-related benefits, social security, and welfare benefits, basic necessity, health and safety, working conditions and standards, and insurance.

The new law, named after the late veteran actor Eddie Garcia who died while filming on the set, states that the worker and the employer or principal shall execute an agreement or an employment contract in a language or dialect understood by both parties before the commencement of service.

In September, Marcos signed RA 10201, or the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers. This law aims to protect the rights and overall welfare of domestic and overseas Filipino seafarers and promote their full employment.

Agricultural Sector Support

Addressing challenges in agriculture, President Marcos signed RA 12022, or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, in September. It defines and penalizes crimes related to agricultural economic sabotage, including large-scale smuggling of agricultural products, hoarding, profiteering, and cartelization.

This law likewise grants jurisdiction to the Court of Tax Appeals and strengthens enforcement mechanisms to protect farmers and consumers from illicit activities that disrupt the agricultural economy.

In a year marked by bold decisions and the controversial collapse of a once-formidable alliance, President Marcos enacted laws reflecting his commitment to economic revitalization, social equity, and national security.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. (File photo)

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<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/29/marcos-2024-signed-landmark-laws>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Pangasinan farmer builds cacao ‘empire’ from backyard hobby

By: [Yolanda Sotelo](#) - Correspondent / [@yzsoteloINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:02 AM December 29, 2024



HOMEgrown Conrado Soriano’s venture into organic cacao farming has given Pangasinan another line of homegrown products that can compete with those produced in provinces popular for local chocolates. —Photos by Ray Zambrano

SAN JACINTO, PANGASINAN, Philippines — Conrado Soriano, 63, finds himself transported back to his childhood as he strolls through his nearly 4-hectare orchard, reminding him of the days when his family’s backyard, filled with cacao trees, was his playground.

“We had 20 cacao trees in our backyard then. My father taught me how to plant cacao. We harvested the fruits and made ‘tablea de cacao,’” Soriano said in a recent interview. “Tablea de cacao” is a traditional delicacy made from roasted, ground and molded cacao beans, ready to be transformed into a thick and flavorful chocolate drink.

As he walked among his cacao trees, memories of sipping fresh, homemade chocolate drinks flooded Soriano's mind as he went through the daily grind of earning a living and raising a family.

In 2011, at the age of 50, Soriano, a marine engineer by profession, decided to reconnect with his roots. He purchased land in central Pangasinan and began planting hundreds of cacao trees.

What started as a mere hobby soon blossomed into a serious business venture.

Certified

As the cacao trees grew, yielding abundant harvests, Soriano and his wife Myrna decided to expand their vision.

Their farm in San Vicente village stands as a thriving cacao orchard, home to 3,500 trees, producing about 70,000 kilos of cacao beans each year.

Soriano's Royal Cacao Farm and Training and Assessment Center had been certified as among the organic farms in the Ilocos region.

In August, the farm was awarded a Participatory Organic Certificate (POC) by the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)-Pangasinan Philippines Inc.

The Soriano farm is the second in Pangasinan to receive certification as an organic farm. The first to earn this distinction is JMS Crops Farm, a 2,000-square-meter farm located in the village of Warey in Malasiqui, Pangasinan. JMS Crops was awarded a POC in January by PGS-Pangasinan.



Owned by Marlyn Inasoria, JMS Crops produces hot green and red peppers, turmeric, tomatoes, eggplants, string beans, okra, taro, and pechay.

Additionally, JMS Crops was accredited in September as a producer of organic fertilizers, including soil amendments, organic foliar 1 (for growth), and organic foliar 2 (for flowering).

At the Royal Cacao Farm and Training and Assessment Center, the Soriano family has also planted a variety of fruit-bearing trees, including avocado, guyabano, pomelo, chico, bananas, and jackfruit.

Soriano is proud to say that his cacao trees since these were planted, have remained untouched by chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The PGS, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA), is a certification mechanism designed to recognize small farmers, fisherfolk, their associations, and cooperatives engaged in organic agriculture and the production of organic products.

Across different provinces, accredited PGS core groups, recognized by the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards, serve as certifying bodies for farms producing organic vegetables, fruits, and processed organic goods.

Receiving a POC means that a farm or company is fully compliant with the Philippine National Standards for Organic Agriculture, the internal standards of the local PGS, and other relevant regulations governing organic farming practices.

Dr. Marvin Quilates, the regional organic farming coordinator for the DA in the Ilocos, said Pangasinan and San Fernando City in La Union province are the only areas in the region with PGS certification.

Meanwhile, Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte are still in the process of securing their certifications.

Currently, there are 12 organic-certified farms in the region—seven in Pangasinan and five in La Union.



SHIFT A marine engineer by profession, Conrado Soriano (shown with wife Myrna) in 2011 chose to devote his time tending to a 4-hectare cacao farm in San Jacinto, Pangasinan.

Steady growth

Quilates acknowledged that the organic agriculture program in Ilocos, which promotes farming without chemicals or synthetic inputs, had been slow to take root but was gradually gaining

momentum. With 12 certified organic farms covering a total of 15.2 hectares, the movement is starting to sprout.

Despite the region's expansive agricultural landscape, the number of ha dedicated to organic farming remains small.

"While 15.2 ha is a modest achievement, we consider it a solid start and more farms are in the pipeline for certification," Quilates said.

Achieving organic certification is no easy feat. Farmers must undergo a rigorous process before receiving the coveted POC.

Even something as small as a piece of plastic found during an inspection, Soriano said, could disqualify a farm from certification.

The Royal Cacao Farm is a pioneer in cacao farming in Pangasinan, cultivating three varieties: Trinitario (using planting materials from Soriano's family backyard), Criollo, and UF. The farm is also the first in the region to cultivate white cacao beans and the first in the country to grow this variety organically.

The farm's cacao beans are processed at Cocoa Federico, a plant in Mangaldan town named in honor of Soriano's father. The beans are turned into both sweetened and unsweetened "tablea," as well as cacao nibs.

The plant's latest innovation is cacao vinegar, a byproduct of the fermentation process of cacao beans.

Challenge

Despite the growing interest in organic farming, marketing organic products remains a significant challenge.

Bernie Trinidad, DA Ilocos market specialist, pointed out that organic products often come at a premium, which can deter consumers.

The price difference stems from the fact that organic farming is labor-intensive, and labor costs are higher, Trinidad said.

“For instance, weeds are easier to control with weedicide, but organic farming requires manual labor to remove them,” he noted.

Additionally, converting a conventional farm to organic certification requires a minimum of three years of being completely chemical-free.

“But we are encouraging organic farmers to align their prices more closely with the inorganic produce. And we are asking the government to provide interventions like mobility or vehicles for delivering their produce,” he said.

The lack of consumer awareness poses another hurdle. Many buyers do not prioritize whether the produce they purchase is organically grown, while others are skeptical about claims of chemical-free farming.

“This is why we hold a yearly regional organic congress to increase awareness about organic farming, which means working in harmony with nature, and for the consumers to know the benefits of chemical-free food,” he said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2019470/pangasinan-farmer-builds-cacao-empire-from-backyard-hobby>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Marcos EO ushers in historic PH-South Korea free trade pact

By: [Julie M. Aurelio](#) - Reporter / [@JMAurelioINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:32 AM December 29, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — President Marcos has issued the schedule of tariff commitments to usher in the implementation of the country's historic free trade agreement (FTA) with South Korea.

The 443 pages of the new reduced or removed tariff rates on a wide array of products, ranging from agricultural produce to vehicles and industrial goods, will take effect on Dec 31.

The schedule was attached to Executive Order No. 80 signed on Dec. 23 which officially implemented the free trade deal.

Released by Malacañang on Saturday, EO 80 said all articles listed in the Philippine Schedule of Tariff Commitments under the FTA will be subject to the rates of import duties at the time of importation. Under the FTA, South Korea will grant preferential duty-free entry or remove tariffs on 11,164 Philippine products accounting for \$3.18 billion, or 87.4 percent of total Korean imports from the Philippines.

For instance, the Philippines sees an increase in banana and processed pineapple exports to South Korea, as the 30-percent tariff on bananas will be lifted within five years while the 36-percent tariff on processed pineapples will be removed in seven years.

Trade surplus

The Philippines, on the other hand, lifted tariffs on some 96.5 percent of goods from South Korea, including automobiles, electric and hybrid vehicles—presenting an opportunity for South Korea's robust automotive industry to expand its presence in the Philippines. South Korea enjoys a trade surplus with the Philippines as the Philippines exports \$3.53 billion worth of products but imports \$8.49 billion worth of goods from South Korea, including electronics, according to records of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Marcos hopes that the FTA—signed in September 2023 and ratified by the Philippines and South Korea this year—sought to strengthen the two nations’ economic partnership and bilateral trade.

This is by “reducing and eliminating tariff restrictions in support of government efforts to manage competitive exclusion, encourage more foreign direct investments, and secure more preferential concessions than those currently available under existing agreements.”

Ahead of schedule

Hence, “there is a need to modify the rates of import duty on certain imported articles for the country to comply with the Philippine Schedule of Tariff Commitments under the PH-KR FTA,” said Marcos in signing the EO. Last week, the South Korean Embassy in Manila said the free trade deal would enter into force a year ahead of schedule on Dec. 31, or ahead of the 75th year of diplomatic ties between the Philippines and South Korea.

The Philippines became the first Southeast Asian country to recognize and inaugurate diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea with formal bilateral ties established on March 3, 1949.

The South Korean Embassy said the FTA would “unlock significant opportunities for both countries” through deeper trade and investment ties in industry, agriculture, infrastructure, and energy.

In November, Marcos thanked South Korea for reinforcing the Philippines’ call for a “brighter and more sustainable future” after South Korea’s National Assembly ratified the free trade deal on Nov. 14.

“We are also thankful to the Republic of Korea for the overwhelming support of your National Assembly for the ratification of our FTA, which came much earlier than we had expected,” he said in November, adding that the FTA will allow the Philippines to sell its “best products in South Korea.”

The FTA was signed in September last year, but it was only in September 2024 that the Philippine Senate ratified the FTA.

Right to recourse

Under EO 80, the Tariff Commission may be requested to issue advance rulings on the tariff classification of goods to confirm the applicable rates of duty of goods covered by the directive.

EO 80 added that the Philippines retains the right to recourse to all trade remedy measures provided for in the country's laws, the FTA, and other international agreements to "ensure the prevention of import surges or unfair trade practices." Should any provision of the directive be declared invalid or unconstitutional, the unaffected provisions will remain in full force and in effect.

On the investment front, the Board of Investments (BOI) has projected the FTA will help bring foreign direct investments worth P150 billion to P200 billion to the Philippines during the first three years of its effectivity.

In particular, the BOI sees this infusion of foreign capital in the electric vehicle value chain and in agricultural processing during the period.

The free trade deal also provided a mechanism for economic cooperation in creative industries, innovation, and manufacturing. —*with a report from Alden M. Monzon*

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/259558/marcos-eo-ushers-in-historic-ph-south-korea-free-trade-pact>

BUSINESS WORLD:

DA warned vs food emergency

December 29, 2024 | 7:19 pm



REUTERS

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture's (DA) proposal to declare a "food security emergency" risks being leveraged to increase rice imports, warned a former lawmaker, fearing such a move could undermine local farmers and destabilize the agriculture sector.

Former Bayan Muna Rep. Ferdinand R. Gaité said in a statement on Sunday that the proposed measure, rooted in the framework of the Rice Liberalization Law, could expedite rice importation.

He highlighted this as a potential short-term fix that sidesteps addressing deeper issues, including smuggling, hoarding, and flawed agricultural policies.

"President [Ferdinand R.] Marcos, Jr.'s empty promise of P20 per kilo rice has only led to a series of band-aid solutions that worsened food inflation. Now they want to declare an emergency that could open the floodgates to more imports. Where did the promise of food security and self-sufficiency go?" he added in mixed English and Filipino.

Bayan Muna, alongside farmer advocacy groups such as the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, is pushing for solutions focused on repealing liberalization policies, reinstating the National Food Authority's buying mandate and increasing production subsidies.

They are also calling for stronger regulatory action against rice cartels and comprehensive support for farmers facing environmental and man-made challenges.

"Emergency powers to import are not the solution. The solution is to strengthen local agriculture and protect our farmers." — **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2024/12/29/643908/da-warned-vs-food-emergency/>

REMATE:

Mahigit 5K magsasaka sa NegOr nakinabang sa loan condonation program

December 29, 2024 12:33



MANILA, Philippines – Mahigit 5,000 agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) sa Negros Oriental ang nakatanggap ng financial relief noong 2024.

Ito ay kasunod ng condonation program sa mahigit P692 milyong loan debts sa ilalim ng administrasyon ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Inanunsyo ni Manuel Galon, provincial agrarian reform officer ng Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)-Negros Oriental, nitong Sabado, Disyembre 28 na naipamahagi na ang 6,612 Certificates of Condonation with Release of Mortgages (CoCRoM) sa 5,321 ARBs mula noong Hulyo. Sakop nito ang 7,605.83 ektarya ng agricultural land.

Target ng DAR-Negros Oriental ang 40,000 ektarya ng agricultural land na sasakupin ng CoCRoM project sa susunod na taon.

“The release of the CoCRoM is according to the land title and not necessarily per ARB, as some beneficiaries may be holding two or more CLOAs (Certificate of Land Ownership Awards),” paliwanag ni Galon.

Ang loan condonation ay bahagi ng New Agrarian Emancipation Act (Republic Act No. 11953), na nag-aalis ng principal loans, unpaid amortizations, at interest ng ARBs sa ilalim ng government land reform programs.

Ani Galon, makatutulong ang programa sa mga magsasaka na maging produktibo at ‘appreciative’ sa halaga ng lupa na iginawad sa kanila ng pamahalaan. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/mahigit-5k-magsasaka-sa-negor-nakinabang-sa-loan-condonation-program/>

REMATE:

NFA may sapat na buffer stock sa oras ng kalamidad ngayong holiday season

December 29, 2024 10:10



MANILA, Philippines – Siniguro ng National Food Authority (NFA) nitong Sabado, Disyembre 28 ang publiko na sapat ang rice buffer stock para tugunan ang pangangailangan sa oras ng kalamidad ngayong holiday season.

Ang pahayag ng NFA ay kasunod ng ulat ng aktibidad sa Bulkang Kanlaon at mga namonitor na sama ng panahon sa malaking bahagi ng bansa.

“We have instructed our employees in the field to immediately activate our Operation Centers (OpCen) in the areas affected by floods, typhoons, and other emergencies and to open their hotlines to fast track coordination with our relief institutions,” pahayag ni NFA Administrator Larry Lacson.

“Holiday season tayo ngayon ngunit ang aming tanggapan ay laging bukas upang tugunan ang pangangailangan ng ating mga kababayan. Kasama sa ating pagseserbisyo ang kahandaan sa anumang oras ng pangangailangan,” dagdag pa niya.

Anang NFA, pinalakas din nito ang kanilang palay buying strategies sa ilalim ng Price Range Scheme (PRICERS) para matugunan ang rice relief requests mula sa Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Local Government Units (LGUs), at Legislators para sa distribusyon sa mga apektadong pamilya at indibidwal sa calamity stricken areas.

Iginiit ng NFA na naabot nito ang 95% ng buffer stocking target ngayong taon.

Ang kasalukuyang buffer stock ay nasa 5.661 million bags ng equivalent milled rice. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/nfa-may-sapat-na-buffer-stock-sa-oras-ng-kalamidad-ngayong-holiday-season/>

MANILA STANDARD:

NFA to release buffer stock in case of calamity

By [Manila Standard](#)

December 29, 2024, 12:20 am

The National Food Authority said it is ready to release its rice buffer stock in case of a calamity during the holidays.

The NFA gave the assurance amid the continued restiveness of the Kanlaon Volcano as well as the impact of the prevailing intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ) in most parts of the country.

“We have instructed our employees in the field to immediately activate our Operation Centers (OpCen) in the areas affected by floods, typhoons, and other emergencies and to open their hotlines to fast track coordination with our relief institutions,” said NFA Administrator Larry Lacson.

“Holiday season but we are always open to serve our people in times of need,” he added.

The NFA has reached 95 percent of its buffer stock target this year.

As this developed, the Department of Social Welfare and Development Field Office-Davao Region (FO-11) extended assistance to families displaced by flash floods due to the heavy rainfall caused by the prevailing ITCZ.

“We received reports from our Davao Field Office of several incidents of flooding in Davao Occidental. As of today, we have extended 887 family food packs (FFPs) worth P541,070 to the affected localities for distribution to their affected constituents,” Assistant Secretary for Disaster Response Management Group Irene Dumlao said yesterday.

“Currently, some 739 families or 3,158 individuals are staying in five evacuation centers in Davao Occidental. We are checking with the LGUs if they need additional food and non-food items for the displaced residents. Our regional office has 157,339 FFPs and standby funds available for augmentation if the need arises,” she added.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314541074/nfa-to-release-buffer-stock-in-case-of-calamity.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Red tide warning in Tacloban lifted

By Moises Cruz

December 29, 2024

(UPDATE) TACLOBAN CITY —The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in Region 8 (Eastern Visayas) lifted the red tide warning at Cancabato Bay in Tacloban City and the coastal waters of Guiuan in Eastern Samar as the seawater examined in these areas tested negative for red tide toxin.

The "red tide" refers to coastal conditions in which the water is discolored due to a high concentration of algae.

According to a recent study by BFAR 8-Regional Fisheries Laboratory, the seawater was negative for *Pyrodinium bahamense*, a dinoflagellate that produces red tide toxin (Saxitoxin).

To date, only Calbayog, Samar, is under a red tide warning, and the public is cautioned to refrain from harvesting, selling and eating shellfish and *Acetes* sp., locally known as "hipon" (shrimp), in this area to prevent paralytic shellfish poisoning.

A shellfish ban was imposed in the following areas: Daram Island, Samar; Zumarraga Island, Samar; Irong-irong Bay, Samar; Matarinao Bay, Eastern Samar; and Biliran Island.

"Anyone violating this 'Shellfish Ban' will face penalties," the BFAR said in an advisory on Saturday.

"Fish, squid, shrimp and crab from these waters are 'safe to consume' as long as they are fresh and their internal organs, such as intestines and gills, are removed and thoroughly washed," it added.

Red tide outbreaks are an ongoing concern in Eastern Visayas, affecting public health and the local economy.

BFAR-8 stressed the necessity of proactive measures, such as frequent water quality testing, strengthened public awareness and environmental protection, in reducing the impact of future red tide occurrences.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/29/regions/red-tide-warning-in-tacloban-lifted/2028139>

THE MANILA TIMES:

China to investigate beef imports

By Agence France-Presse

December 29, 2024

BEIJING — China's commerce ministry on Friday launched an investigation into imported beef at the request of representatives from its struggling domestic industry, it said.

The local price of beef in China has trended downwards in recent years, with analysts blaming oversupply and a lack of demand as the world's second-largest economy has slowed.

At the same time, imports have surged, with China representing a hugely important market for countries like Brazil, Argentina and Australia.

The application for an investigation from domestic associations said that a sharp increase in beef imports in recent years "has had a significant adverse impact on the domestic industry," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

Beef imports in 2023 were 65 percent higher than in 2019, it quoted the producers as saying.

The investigation takes effect from Friday and should take eight months, but "may be extended appropriately under special circumstances," the announcement said.

Normal trade will not be affected during the investigation period.

Brazil, the world's biggest beef exporter, said it "will seek to demonstrate that Brazilian beef exported to China does not cause any type of harm to the Chinese industry, and is, on the contrary, an important factor in complementing local Chinese production."

Its foreign ministry noted that, "in principle, no preliminary measures will be adopted, and the 12 percent 'ad valorem' tariff that China applies to beef imports will remain in force."

Brazil's statement said that China, its main trading partner, this year received more than 1 million tons of Brazilian beef, a 12.7-percent increase over last year.

It added that it was committed to defending Brazil's agribusiness sector and was "always seeking constructive dialogue in search of mutually beneficial solutions" with China.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/29/business/top-business/china-to-investigate-beef-imports/2028072>