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## ***DA lifts ban on poultry imports from 2 US states***

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has lifted the ban on the importation of domestic and wild birds and their products from two states in the US after the outbreak of avian flu had already been addressed.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Memorandum Order 13 allowing the resumption in the importation of live poultry, poultry products and byproducts including day-old chicks and hatching eggs originating from Iowa and Minnesota.

"Based on the official report of US Veterinary Authorities in the World Organization Animal Health, all affected counties of Iowa and Minnesota reported that the High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) cases have ended with resolved status and no additional outbreaks after Dec. 20, 2023 and Jan. 10, 2024," Laurel said.

Laurel said as a country recognized with HPAI regionalization arrangement with the Philippines, state wide trade restrictions shall only be imposed if there are three or more countries affected by HPAI.

"This order is hereby issued to lift the temporary ban on the importation of live poultry, poultry products, and by-products including day-old chicks and hatching eggs originating from the states of Iowa and Minnesota and shall be in accordance with existing rules and regulations of the DA," he added.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the bird flu spreads among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.

It said that bird flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with avian influenza viruses have occurred.



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## Holy Week: PNP on heightened alert; DOH activates Code White Alert; fish prices rising

By AARON RECUENCO, ZEKINAH ELIZE ESPINA, and GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

All police forces around the country will be on heightened alert starting tomorrow March 25, while the Department of Health (DOH) activated Code White Alert starting today as part of the preparations for the exodus of millions of people to the provinces for the long Holy Week break.

Ahead of the Holy Week, prices

of bangus, tilapia, galunggong, and other leading fish are increasing.

Col. Jean Fajardo, Philippine National Police (PNP) spokesperson, said the heightened alert status will be until April 1.

Police commanders, however, were given the authority to adjust the alert status depending on the

situation in their respective areas of responsibility.

In terms of police deployment, PNP chief Gen. Benjamin Acorda Jr. said they increased the number to more than 52,000 and he said their personnel will be augmented by around 87,000 personnel from various government agencies across the country. ▶8



## Holy Week: PNP on heightened alert; DOH activates Code White Alert; fish prices rising 1◀

"There will be sufficient personnel or manpower that would be deployed in the different areas of concern like roads, event coverages, ports and airports. Our intelligence monitoring will continue," said Acorda. "If there is a need to add more, we still have reserve forces. We can put up or deploy additional forces from our reserve force."

Millions of people are expected to go back to their hometowns and to go on vacation to take advantage of the Holy Week break as Maundy Thursday, March 27, and Good Friday, March 29, are regular holidays, while Black Saturday was declared a special non-working holiday.

The Philippine Ports Authority is expecting at least two million passengers around the country while the Manila International Airport Authority is expecting at least one million passengers.

Transportation Secretary Jaime J. Bautista has already directed all officials to ensure safety of all commuters and motorists for the long Lenten break.

On the part of the Land Transportation Office (LTO), its chief Assistant Secretary Vigor D. Mendoza II tasked all regional directors to intensify the conduct of road safety inspections of all passenger buses before they leave the bus terminals.

Part of the inspections is the conduct of random drug tests on bus drivers and conductors.

On the part of the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), at least 1,000 special permits were already given to public utility vehicles.

### Preparing for medical emergencies

The DOH, meanwhile, said Code White Alert aims to ensure preparedness for potential medical emergencies as individuals and families travel to provinces, tourist destinations, and places of worship.

"The DOH family joins all Filipino families in the solemn and healthy observance of Holy Week 2024," said Health Secretary Teodoro Herbosa.

He also reiterated President Marcos's directives, stating that hospitals are now

on Code White Alert, ready to provide care in case of any medical crisis.

"Let us pray and hope for continued safety and health for the country," he added.

Moreover, the health agency stated that a Code White Alert, declared during significant national events or holidays, signifies readiness for potential mass casualty incidents.

Under this alert status, designated medical personnel and staff are on standby to promptly attend to incoming patients at hospitals.

The DOH, through its Health Emergency Management Bureau (HEMB), maintains active monitoring efforts. It advises the public on essential health precautions.

### Health tips

People were urged to stay hydrated by consuming ample clean water and minimizing heat exposure to avoid heat-related ailments.

Remain vigilant against prevalent dry-season illnesses such as sore eyes, prickly heat rash, coughs, colds, and skin conditions, including vector-borne diseases like dengue.

Additionally, parents and guardians were reminded to supervise children during water activities to prevent accidents.

These guidelines, as DOH said, aim to ensure a safe and healthy observance of Holy Week amid potential health risks.

### Fish prices rising

Meanwhile, prices of bangus, tilapia, galunggong, and other leading fish are increasing as the holy week approaches.

Since most Filipinos practice fasting and abstinence during the Lenten season, public markets, like the Paco Market, prepare for the rising demand as early as Saturday, March 23.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the price of bangus was at ₱192.6 per kilo last March 18 to 22.

However, Paco Market prices for bangus averaged around ₱180 to ₱200 as sizes vary.

The price of tilapia last week was ₱141.30 per kilo, then it fluctuated to ₱130 to ₱160.

Galunggong's average price in the fish market on Saturday peaked at ₱240 per kilo, compared to ₱193 to ₱222.60 last week.

Other seafood prices, such as pusit, have reached ₱360 per kilo depending on the size, while talakitok is at ₱280 per kilo.

The price of red snapper or maya-maya is at ₱180 per kilo in the Paco Market.

Recently, DA spokesperson Arnel De Mesa said that fish value will soon have a 10 to 20 percent minimal increase. He, however, assured that there is still an ample supply of fish.

Aside from seafood, Catholics are also opting for vegetables during abstinence.

Tomatoes remain at around ₱60 to ₱68 per kilo, ampalaya at ₱124 per kilo average, and sitaw at ₱113 per kilo.

Prices of red onions, on the other hand, are around ₱91 to ₱130 per kilo, while garlic's average is at ₱151.76.



## GOV'T GOAL

**TWO administration lawmakers said the executive and legislative branches of government are exerting efforts to ensure food security and zero hunger in the country.**

House Deputy Majority Leader PBA Party-list Rep. Margarita "Atty. Migs" Nograles and Negros Occidental Rep. Francisco "Kiko" Benitez expressed support to Marcos administration in fulfilling its food security and zero hunger goals for the Filipinos.

Benitez noted how the moves done by the House of Representatives, particularly the aggressiveness by which the House leadership looked into the issue of food inflation, has led to the deceleration of the inflation rate in the country.

"Pababa pong pababa actually ang inflation natin and again it really is because we're deliberately and quite systematically addressing food inflation. I think that moving forward, we need to sustain having to control inflation because it's the entirety of our economic recovery na iniisip po ni Speaker Martin (Romualdez)," Benitez said.

He said the House leadership has been relentlessly studying and focusing on the many roots and effects of inflation.

According to Benitez, food security is part of an important concern for the House.

He attributed half of the country's overall inflation rate to food inflation.

Meanwhile, Nograles observed that the executive offices are also focusing on the problem of hunger in the country.

"I think the DA (Department of Agriculture) said that (for) the 2025 budget, ipa-prioritize nila for poultry, high-value crops. So, it's not just Congress that's working on it. It's this administration, its various departments. Kasi nga I think even earlier 'di ba, on the term of PBBM, he said na gusto niya nga zero hunger sana," Nograles said.

She added that Congress, to complement the administration's efforts, is also looking into various means and legislation in order to aid the people.

Among the food security programs are Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair; SIBOL (Start-up, Incentives, Business Opportunities and Livelihood), FARM (Farmers Assistance for Modernization and Recovery), and CARD (Cash and Rice Distribution).

Congress is also looking into various legislative measures to ensure the sustainability of food security programs instead of merely giving assistance to the people. *Jester Manalastas*