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Ecuador, Colombia slam use of wild animal species after MasterChef episode

Ecuador on Tuesday warned would-be wild animal eaters of possible prison time and Colombia launched an investigation after a competitive cooking TV show featured shark, alligator and capybara as ingredients. In the offending episode, contestants of MasterChef Ecuador cooked up tolo, a small shark, as well as a type of wild deer and a capybara, a large rodent that can weigh up to 80 kilograms (175 lbs). The National Animal Movement of Ecuador warned that the use of such ingredients on TV would "normalize the consumption of protected animals, whose ownership contributes to the trafficking of wild animals and the destruction of ecosystems."

Neither the channel nor the producers of the program responded to the charges leveled against them, though the show's chef and judge, Carolina Sanchez, claimed the meat was "from a farm." In response to the program, which was filmed in Colombia, Ecuador's environment ministry said it "rejects the promotion and dissemination of graphic or audiovisual content that encourages the purchase and consumption of wild species or their constituent elements."

It also warned that crimes against wild flora and fauna can be punished with prison sentences of up to three years. In Colombia, Environment Minister Carlos Eduardo Correa announced an investigation. He said authorities "are verifying information circulating on social networks about the use of wildlife by-products in television programs." "Trafficking and marketing of wildlife is a crime in Colombia," he wrote on Twitter. MasterChef Ecuador, which is in its third season, is recorded in Colombia and broadcast on the privately owned national channel Telemazonas. —AFP



In this file photo taken, the stage is set for the nominations announcement for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. A stripped-down Golden Globes will go ahead with no audience or media on January 9, 2022, as the event traditionally known as Hollywood's biggest party reels from an industry boycott over ethical lapses by its organizers. —AFP photos



Helen Hoehne, president of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), attends the nominations announcement for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

GOLDEN GLOBES TO GO AHEAD WITHOUT AUDIENCE OR TV

A stripped-down Golden Globes will go ahead with no audience or media on Sunday, as the event traditionally known as Hollywood's biggest party reels from an industry boycott over ethical lapses by its organizers. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association - which votes on the Globes - has been accused of racism, sexism, bullying and corruption, with television rights-holder NBC last year pulling the plug on its annual awards broadcast.

Nonetheless, honors in film and television will be announced Sunday from the Globes' usual Beverly Hills hotel venue, in a program the organization said was set to highlight "the long-established philanthropy work of the HFPA." "Over the past 25 years, the HFPA has donated \$50 million to

more than 70 entertainment-related charities, film restoration, scholarship programs and humanitarian efforts," the group said in a statement.

No audience will be present for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, the group said, citing health concerns due to the coronavirus pandemic and the rapidly spreading Omicron variant. The Golden Globes have traditionally been second in importance only to the Oscars in Hollywood's film awards season, but their credibility has been thrown into question - and their future plunged into doubt.

Many Tinseltown publicists and studios refused to participate in this year's edition, and A-listers publicly distanced themselves from the embattled group, at least until reforms are made. The HFPA

announced its annual nominations last month, with Kenneth Branagh's childhood-inspired "Belfast" and Jane Campion's dark Western "The Power of the Dog" topping the selections with seven nods apiece.

But ads and billboards boasting of Golden Globe nomination tallies have been notably absent in Los Angeles this winter. The organization - consisting of just over 100 entertainment writers connected to foreign publications - has rushed through reforms, including admitting its biggest ever annual intake of new members last year. The HFPA diversity row was triggered by a Los Angeles Times investigation last year showing that the organization at the time did not have a single Black member. —AFP

JAPAN TUNA GOES FOR \$145,000: PANDEMIC DAMPENS AUCTION

Chef Akifumi Sakagami (center) holds a part of a tuna which was bought jointly by Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and wholesaler Yamayuki for 16.9 million yen (145,290 USD) at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction, at a restaurant yesterday. —AFP photos



Journalists and bystanders look at a tuna which was bought jointly by Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and wholesaler Yamayuki for 16.9 million yen (145,290 USD) at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction.

The buyer of a \$145,000 tuna at Tokyo's traditional New Year auction said yesterday he hoped the purchase would "brighten" a COVID-hit 2022. The top price paid for a tuna at the first auction of the year at Tokyo's Toyosu fish market fell for the third year running, with demand hit by the pandemic. The 16.88 million yen shelled out jointly by a restaurant operator and a wholesaler for the huge bluefin tuna yesterday was far below the 2019 record of 333.6 million yen. The first tuna auction of the year at Toyosu market is a closely watched tradition that draws a horde of fish wholesalers every year.

Bidders sometimes shell out an enormous amount to win the top-priced tuna, which is seen as bringing good luck, as well as plenty of publicity for the buyer. Yesterday's top-priced 211-

kilogram (465-pound) fish was caught off the northern Aomori region of Japan, famous for its quality tuna, and went to Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and Japanese wholesaler Yamayuki. Hours after the early-morning auction, the prize fish was delivered to a restaurant operated by Onodera in Tokyo's upscale Omotesando neighborhood to be publicly sliced and filleted.

"I participated in the auction hoping to get the top-priced tuna, which is considered auspicious, and serve it to our customers to brighten their year ahead a little, even as our world remains marred by the pandemic," head chef Akifumi Sakagami told AFP. The tuna will be offered to customers both in Japan and at the firm's restaurants abroad, including in Hawaii, New York and

Los Angeles, he added. Sushi enthusiasts gathered outside the upscale Tokyo restaurant to await the tuna, eager for a morsel.

Junko Kawabata, 78, said she had jumped on the expressway from her home in eastern Tokyo for the chance to taste the top-priced catch. "I just love tuna," she said, proudly displaying a numbered ticket indicating she would be the first customer to be served. "I can't wait to eat a piece of it." Another sushi lover, 59-year-old company employee Mitsuaki Tsubota, also arrived early to get a ticket. Tsubota, whose workplace is across the street from the Onodera restaurant, said he would pop out of the office during his lunch break to enjoy the tuna. "That would be a very luxurious lunch," he said with a grin. —AFP

FUROR OVER KFC KENYA FRIES FIASCO

US fast-food chain KFC has triggered an online furor in Kenya after it ran out of fries, with local Twitter users threatening a boycott because it does not use locally-sourced potatoes. "You love our chips a little too much, and we've run out. Sorry!" KFC admitted on Twitter this week, offering its customers various alternatives.

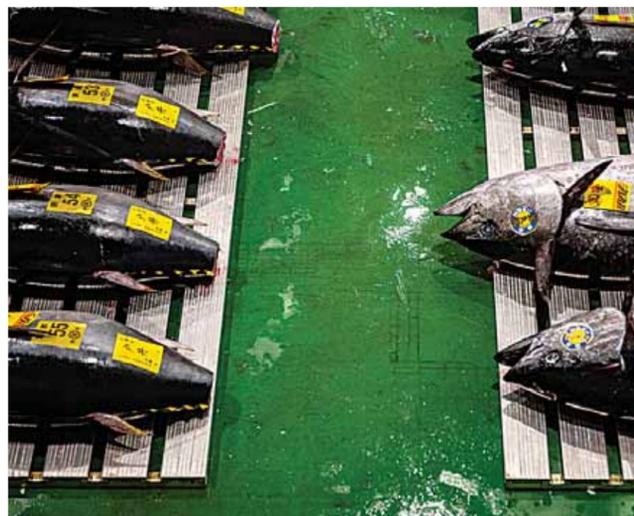
The franchise's regional boss Jacques Theunissen said it had become the latest casualty of global shipping disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. "It has to do with delays in shipping lines due to the COVID situation," he told local news outlet Business Daily. He said KFC was hoping to resolve the shortage with the expected arrival of a container-load of potatoes this week. But it was his admission that the company does not source potatoes from local farmers that ignited a Twitter storm among Kenyans.

"All suppliers need to go through the global quality assurance approval process and we cannot bypass that even if we run out to ensure that our food is safe for consumption by our customers," Theunissen said. With the news coming during Kenya's potato harvesting season, many took to social media to call for people to snub the fast-food giant and #BoycottKFC was trending on Twitter. "If you are a true Kenyan, you should not eat chips prepared by KFC! Eat chips elsewhere," one user tweeted.

The fried chicken franchise entered the Kenyan market in 2011 and has 35 outlets across the East African region. Kenya grows more than 60 different varieties of potatoes, with farmers currently struggling with a glut. In an apparent U-turn, KFC said Tuesday it had initiated plans to source potatoes from Kenyan farmers, adding it was already doing so for other goods such as poultry, vegetables, flour and ice cream. KFC's competitors were quick to take advantage of the gaffe to promote their own chips, with Burger King tweeting: "We have enough fries for everyone." —AFP



Wholesaler Yukitaka Yamaguchi cuts a tuna which at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction, at a restaurant in Tokyo yesterday.



Bluefin tuna lined up in rows are seen as wholesalers participate in the New Year's tuna auction at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo, Japan yesterday.