

# Swiftlet farmers cry foul over new China ban

FRESH DIGEST

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**BEIJING'S** move to prohibit travellers from bringing in edible bird's nest into China may destroy Malaysia's swiftlet farming industry, Federation of Edible Bird's Nest Merchants Associations deputy chairman Datuk Choot Seng Chai said.

He said that for an industry still reeling from the issue of nitrite content that has kept Malaysian bird's nest out of the Chinese market for more than six months, the new ruling was a death knell for the country's 60,000 swiftlet farmers.

"Do you know how many people have invested their life savings in the industry? Does the Malaysian government know how many rice bowls depend on the industry? Does

the government want us to switch to selling 4-D numbers instead?" he asked *China Press*, commenting on reports that the Chinese agriculture ministry had included bird's nest in its list of prohibited and restricted goods.

Choot said China's new ruling was unfair because Malaysia does not restrict the entry of Chinese goods. He urged the Health Ministry to quickly resolve with Chinese authorities the

issue of nitrite content as 90% of bird's nest produced in Malaysia is meant for the Chinese market.

Choot urged the International Trade and Industry Ministry to help bird's nest farmers look for fresh markets for their products, pending a solution to the stalemate over nitrite levels in bird's nest.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said he would contact his Chinese counterpart to determine

reasons for the prohibition.

He said the prohibition is not targeted at Malaysia's swiftlet farming industry as the list includes other animal and plant products.

Meanwhile, Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Datuk Chua Tee Yong said that while the ministry takes a serious view of the Chinese move, it would comment on the matter only when more details become available.