



MANILA — The United States and European Union (EU) regulators have removed the Philippines from their air safety blacklist, opening the door for Filipino airlines to expand services in two Western markets.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) decision comes after the EU in July 2013 lifted its own ban on flag carrier Philippine Airlines (PAL) after it upgraded safety standards.

“From one major achievement to another in a span of less than two years, the country has made great strides in enhancing its aviation industry to one that is at par with the best in the world,” Transportation Secretary Joseph Abaya said.

The upgrade will have a significant impact on the country’s economy, boosting tourism, trade

and business relations, he added.

The FAA put the Philippines on its “Category 2” blacklist in 2008, saying it had failed to comply with international safety standards.

This resulted in Philippine carriers being banned from expanding their services to the U.S.

The EU in 2010 banned all Philippine carriers from flying to Europe for similar reasons.

PAL, the country’s only carrier with flights to the U.S., had been allowed to continue services but under heightened FAA surveillance.

In a separate development last Thursday, the EU too lifted the ban on the Philippines’ budget carrier Cebu Pacific from flying to EU member nations.

“We welcome this development, a testament to Cebu Pacific’s commitment to safety and full compliance with the international aviation safety standards,” said the president of the upstart airline, Lance Gokongwei.

The EU ban on PAL had been lifted last year.

Philippine aviation agencies have been reforming administrative procedures and increasing monitoring of airlines and aircraft.

A letter from the FAA, released by the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), praised “the hard work completed by the Philippine Government on the safety oversight system.”

FAA upgrades PH aviation-safety rating

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The FAA website said it had raised the Philippines from a “Category 2” rating back to “Category 1” following a March 2014 review which found that the government now complies with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

President Benigno Aquino’s spokeswoman Abigail Valte said the move would bring greater success to the country’s aviation and tourism industries.

As a result of the safety upgrade, other Philippine carriers can now fly to the U.S. while PAL can add routes and increase flight frequencies.

(AFP)