



SUPREME COURT OF THE PHILIPPINES
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Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
 Manila

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ANONYMOUS,
 Complainant,

A.M. No. RTJ-25-112
[Formerly JIB FPI No. 22-185- RTJ]

Present:

-versus-

GESMUNDO, C.J.,
 LEONEN,*
 CAGUIOA,
 HERNANDO,
 LAZARO-JAVIER,
 INTING,
 ZALAMEDA,
 GAERLAN,
 ROSARIO,
 LOPEZ,
 DIMAAMPAO,
 MARQUEZ,
 KHO, JR.,
 SINGH, and
 VILLANUEVA,** JJ.

HON. JACINTO M. DELA CRUZ, JR., Presiding Judge,
 Branch 81, Regional Trial Court, Asingan, Pangasinan,
 Respondent.

Promulgated:
 February 4, 2026

[Signature]

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DECISION

LAZARO-JAVIER, J.:

* Dissenting

** No part due to prior participation as Court Administrator.

[Handwritten mark]

The Complaints Docket Services, Office of the Executive Director, Judicial Integrity Board (JIB) received an Anonymous Letter dated July 5, 2022 involving respondent Judge Jacinto M. Dela Cruz, Jr. (Judge Dela Cruz, Jr.), presiding judge, Branch 81, Regional Trial Court, Asingan, Pangasinan, viz.:

Gusto ko po sanang ipaalam sa inyo ang hindi Magandang ginagawa ni JUDGE JACINTO DELA CRUZ ng Branch 33 ng RTC, Bauang, La Union. Kapag nagrerender siya ng Decision sa criminal cases on-line, iyong dispositive portion ang nababasa lang. Pagkatapos, matagal po niyang nilalabas iyong hard copy ng Decision. May mga Decisions na naacquit iyong mga akusado, hanggang ngayong wala pang copy ng Decision. Hindi sila makakuha ng court clearance. Nakakaawa din iyong sitwasyon ng mga convicted kasi hindi sila makapag-a[p]peal hanggat hindi nila narereceive iyong kopya ng Decision. May mga naconvict na ng matagal, hanggang ngayon wala pa iyong hard copy ng Decision. Mga abogado at relatives ng akusado ay nagfallow-up pero wala pa rin. Nirereport na disposal ng Clerk of Court pero walang hard copy ng Decision. Pwde niyo pong icheck iyong reports ng RTC 33[.]¹

In its Report and Recommendation² dated August 18, 2022, the JIB-Office of the General Counsel, through Atty. Romulo A. Paras, Jr., recommended the referral of the matter to the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA) for investigation and report. From July 3 to 7, 2023, an OCA Investigation Team did a spot audit and investigation of Branch 33, Regional Trial Court, Bauang, La Union. Per its subsequent Report³ dated August 15, 2023, the OCA recommended that its Investigation Report and the Anonymous Letter dated July 5, 2022 be considered a formal administrative complaint against Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. After due proceedings, the OCA Investigation Team submitted the following findings, thus:

1. Judge Dela Cruz acted with gross inefficiency and/or gross neglect of duty by knowingly circumventing the mandatory period of 90 days or three months within which to resolve or to decide cases by making it appear that cases were decided and promulgated within the reglementary period but hard copies of the complete Decision were issued several months after promulgation and antedating the same making it appear that it was decided within the required 90-day period;

2. He violated Article VIII, Section 14 of the Constitution;⁴

¹ *Rollo*, p. 3.

² *Id.* at 3-6.

³ *Id.* at 15-34.

⁴ SECTION. 14. No decision shall be rendered by any court without expressing therein clearly and distinctly the facts and the law on which it is based[.]

3. He is liable for utter disregard of court procedure in promulgating judgement[s] and the right of the accused to be informed of the facts and law on which such judgment is based; and

4. He is also liable for his false statement in his Certificate of Service by claiming that he decided cases within the reglementary period. Specifically, he stated that all his cases for the months of March, June, August, and October 2022, were decided within three months from the date of submission following Article VIII, Section 15(1) and (2) of the Constitution.⁵

More, Atty. Schelma Surating-Yanguas (Atty. Surating-Yanguas), the branch clerk of court, informed the OCA Investigation Team that the records of some promulgated cases were not currently in the physical custody of the court since Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. brought them home and had yet to return them.⁶ She likewise confirmed that the hard copies of the promulgated decisions were belatedly furnished to party-litigants.⁷ As of July 4, 2023, Atty. Surating-Yanguas was able to certify that at least 21 case records were still in the possession of Judge Dela Cruz, Jr.⁸ Consequently, the OCA Investigation Team recommended the filing of administrative charges against Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. for gross misconduct and falsification of official documents.⁹

Per its 1st Indorsement¹⁰ dated September 26, 2023, the JIB directed Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. to file his verified comment on the Anonymous Letter dated July 5, 2022 and to show cause why he should not be held liable, as a member of the Philippine Bar, for possible violations of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability (CPRA).¹¹

In his Verified Comment¹² dated November 7, 2023, Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. admitted the lapses and delays but reasoned that the same came about only because he needed additional time for further proofreading, editing, and other related tasks. This was aggravated by certain unfortunate events in his life, both personal and work-related, viz.:

13. With all humility and candor, the undersigned hereby admits on bended knees that indeed most of the hearings and promulgation of judgments were done through videoconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

14. As borne by the recordings of the video conference hearings conducted, before promulgation, counsels were asked on how the judgment be promulgated either in full text or dispositive portion only.

⁵ *Rollo*, pp.30-31.

⁶ *Id.* at 19.

⁷ *Id.* at 20.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at 33.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 400-401.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 409-415.

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Most of the time, the counsels would opt for the reading of the dispositive portion only.

15. When the judgement is for acquittal, the accused who is in detention is immediately ordered release[d] from detention, in the absence of any further legal impediment that may cause his/her further detention. **The undersigned would ensure that the person deprived of liberty (PDL) who was acquitted be immediately released from detention, on the same day of promulgation at most.**

16. Considering that the judgment had been promulgated on-line or via video conference hearing, the Clerk of Court would usually state in the monthly report that it is already decided/disposed. (Emphasis in the original).¹³

Report and Recommendation of the JIB

In its Report and Recommendation¹⁴ dated November 4, 2025, the JIB recommended that Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. be held liable for gross misconduct constituting violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct, falsification of official documents, and gross misconduct as a member of the Philippine Bar.¹⁵

The JIB found that the Decisions were released three to 11 months after their promulgation. He should have proofread his decisions before their promulgation and not afterwards.¹⁶ Instead of antedating the Decision or releasing its hard copies several months after its promulgation, he should have requested from the Court an extension of time to resolve the cases. He deceived the Court and made it appear that he complied with the 90-day reglementary period to resolve cases when in truth he did not.¹⁷

Worse, he falsified his monthly certificates of service.¹⁸ He, too, made false statements that he resolved cases within the reglementary period, albeit he only read the dispositive portions of the supposed Decisions to the parties. Due to his misrepresentations, he should be held liable for gross misconduct as a member of the Philippine Bar in violation of Canon II, Section 11, Canon I, Section 1, and Canon IV, Section 33(a), of the CPRA.¹⁹

In sum, the JIB recommended that Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. be found guilty of gross misconduct as a member of the bench, and suffer the penalty of dismissal from the service with forfeiture of all benefits except accrued leave credits, and prohibition from employment in any government agency or

¹³ *Id.* at 411–412.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 437–449.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 449.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 446.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at 448.

instrumentality, including government-owned or controlled corporations.²⁰ It likewise recommended that Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. be ordered to pay a PHP 51,000.00²¹ fine for gross misconduct as a member of the Philippine Bar.

Our Ruling

A.M. No. 25-04-04-SC or the 2025 Code of Judicial Conduct and Accountability (CJCA), which took effect on December 21, 2025, states that: (a) it applies to all incumbent justices and judges in the Philippine Judiciary;²² and (b) its provisions shall apply to all pending and future cases, except to the extent that retroactive application would not be feasible or would work injustice, in which case the procedure under which the cases were filed shall govern.²³ Thus, We ascertain Judge Dela Cruz, Jr.'s liability guided by the principles contained therein.

Misconduct is defined as “a transgression of some established and definite rule of action, more particularly, unlawful behavior or gross negligence by the public officer.” To differentiate gross misconduct from simple misconduct, any of the elements of corruption, clear intent to violate the law, or flagrant disregard of an established rule, must be manifest in the former.²⁴

Corruption, as an element of gross misconduct, consists in the act of an official or fiduciary person who unlawfully and wrongfully uses their station or character to procure some benefit for themselves or for another person, contrary to duty and the rights of others.²⁵

We emphasize, however, that the assailed actions of Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. were not shown to have been tainted with corruption, clear intent to violate the law, or flagrant disregard of an established rule.

Allegedly, he: (1) antedated his decisions, (2) promulgated only the dispositive portions of these decisions via videoconferencing, and (3) released hard copies of these promulgated decisions on much later dates. This was purportedly corroborated by the OCA Investigation Report which revealed that these decisions took three to 11 months to be released to the parties after promulgation. He allegedly falsified his monthly certificates of service by certifying that he resolved all his cases for the months of March, June, August, and October 2022, within three months from the date of submission following Article VIII Section 15(1) and (2) of the Constitution, when in truth he simply

²⁰ *Id.* at 448–449.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Code of Judicial Conduct and Accountability, Preamble.

²³ Code of Judicial Conduct and Accountability, General Provisions, sec. 1.

²⁴ *Office of the Court Administrator v. Sicad*, 943 Phil. 86, 93–94 (2023) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

²⁵ *Id.* at 94.

announced to the parties via video conferencing the supposed dispositive portions of his decisions. No hard copies of the Decisions were released to the parties on the day of the promulgation itself or within a reasonable period thereafter.

Nonetheless, Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. explained that although there were Decisions which he promulgated by simply reading their dispositive portions via videoconferencing, he did so only after the parties and their counsels themselves opted for a reading of the dispositive portions instead of the full decisions.²⁶

Time and again, the Court has expressed its disapproval²⁷ of “*sin perjuicio*” judgments or a judgment without a statement of the facts in support of its conclusion, albeit the same are later on supplemented by the final judgment, as here. Even then, the cases involved here were circa 2020-2022, the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone at that time was still in transition to the so-called “new normal,” including the more prominent use of remote hearings through videoconference platforms. Anxiety and confusion were at their highest level. Thus, for humanitarian and practical considerations, We ought to provide leeway in terms of implementing videoconference hearings during the peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, therefore, and in the absence of any showing of malice or underhanded tactics on the part of Judge Dela Cruz, Jr., his promulgation of decisions online by reading only their dispositive portions deserves utmost understanding, but not without a strong warning that it should never happen again. Otherwise, a more severe penalty will be imposed on him.

As for the release of hard copies of decisions only three to 11 months after their promulgation, Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. readily admits his faults.²⁸ He nevertheless cites several reasons for the delay. *First*. He needed additional time to proofread and edit his decisions because for five years he had no legal researcher assisting him.²⁹ *Second*. He contracted COVID-19 twice in 2023.³⁰ *Third*. His sister, who was taking care of their ill mother, became physically paralyzed.³¹ *Fourth*. Both his parents passed away in 2022, as supported by their respective death certificates.³² *Fifth*. Hard copies of his judgements were already released to all parties and their motions for reconsideration were timely resolved. The hard copies of the resolutions of their motions were likewise released to them. *Last*. He has no backlogs in his current docket.³³ Still, he “appeals and knocks [on] the [Court’s] compassionate heart to have

²⁶ *Rollo*, p. 411.

²⁷ *Engr. Dizon v. Judge Lopez*, 344 Phil. 13, 21 (1997) [Per J. Mendoza, Second Division].

²⁸ *Rollo*, p. 412.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* at 412–413.

³³ *Id.* at 413.

pity [on] a child who committed a mistake to give him a chance to change and not to commit same mistake again.”³⁴

Judge Dela Cruz, Jr.’s explanations are well-taken considering the real challenges and difficulties encountered by members of the bench, and society in general, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022.

As for the alleged falsification of certificates of service, We note Judge Dela Cruz, Jr.’s statement that judgments promulgated online were recorded to have been already decided or resolved. Although this statement is not exactly untrue, We reiterate that the practice of promulgating decisions by simply reading the dispositive portion and providing parties the hard copies of the full decisions only after three to 11 months is an undesirable practice that must be immediately halted. Further, certificates of service must faithfully reflect the real docket and accomplishments in accordance with the established rules of procedure.

We now focus on the infraction committed by Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. when he belatedly furnished hard copies of decisions to litigants long after their promulgation. Indubitably, this is simple misconduct. While violative of Our established rules, it has no element of corruption, clear intent to violate the law, or flagrant disregard of an established rule. In fact, Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. made sure that persons deprived of liberty who were acquitted were immediately released from detention on the same day of the promulgation of the verdict of acquittal.

The Proper Penalty

Under Canon VII, Section 19 of the CJCA, simple misconduct is classified as a less serious charge, viz.:

SECTION 19. *Less serious offenses.* – Less serious offenses include:

(a) Simple misconduct constituting violations of this Code, the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials or Employees, or the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability[.]

Additionally, Canon VII, Section 22 of the CJCA provides for the impossible penalty when the Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. is guilty of a less serious charge, viz.:

SECTION 22. *Penalties.* –

....

³⁴ *Id.*

(2) If the respondent is found guilty of a less serious offense, any of the following penalties shall be imposed:

- (a) Suspension from office without salary and other benefits for no less than one month nor more than six months and one day up to one year; and/or
- (b) A fine of PHP 51,000.00 but not more than PHP 100,000.00[.]

Notably, Canon VII, Sections 24 and 25 of the CJCA, provide how modifying circumstances may be applied in determining the penalty of erring judges, viz.:

SECTION 24. *Modifying Circumstances.* – In determining the appropriate penalty to be imposed, the Court may, in its discretion, appreciate the following mitigating and aggravating circumstances:

1. Mitigating circumstances:

- a. First offense;
- b. Length of service of at least ten years with no previous disciplinary case where respondent was meted with an administrative penalty;
- c. Exemplary performance;
- d. Humanitarian considerations;
- e. Unconditional admission of guilt and public demonstration of remorse; and
- f. Other analogous circumstances.

.....

SECTION 25. *Manner of Imposition.* – If one or more aggravating circumstances and no mitigating circumstances are present, the Supreme Court may impose the penalties of suspension or fine, for a period or amount not less than half of the minimum prescribed under this Canon.

Though Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. violated certain rules, his dedication as a judge cannot be denied. All Decisions for which hard copies were not immediately made available had already been released. No accused, whose judgments were unfavorable, were denied their right to appeal or to file a motion for reconsideration. More, he had no backlog in his docket. He did err, but his exemplary performance as a judge should likewise be recognized. Too, he has no prior violation of existing laws or rules and regulations. Most important, he is remorseful of his infractions; not only did he immediately admit to his violations, but also he acknowledged the same with utmost humility *on bended knees*.

In administrative proceedings, the quantum of proof required is substantial evidence. Substantial evidence is defined as that amount of relevant evidence that a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. The standard of substantial evidence is satisfied when there is reasonable ground to believe that Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. is responsible for the

misconduct complained of, even if such evidence might not be overwhelming or even preponderant, as in this case.³⁵

Verily, We find Judge Dela Cruz, Jr. liable for simple misconduct under Section 19 in relation to Sections 22, 24 and 25 of the CJCA. Pursuant to *Canon VII, Sections 24 and 25 of the CJCA, the imposition of fine in the amount of PHP 25,500.00, or half of the minimum prescribed penalty (PHP 51,000.00) is in order.* In the determination of the penalty, the Court may, in its discretion, appreciate mitigating circumstances, such as humanitarian considerations like remorse, acknowledgment of guilt, and taking responsibility for the act committed, as in the present case.³⁶

As for the charge of gross misconduct as a member of the Philippine Bar under Canon II, Section 11³⁷ of the CPRA on false representations or statements, the same is dismissed for lack of merit.

ACCORDINGLY, the Court finds Judge Jacinto M. Dela Cruz Jr., presiding judge, Branch 81, Regional Trial Court, Asingan, Pangasinan, **LIABLE** of simple misconduct under Canon VII, Section 19 of A.M. No. 25-04-04-SC or the 2025 Code of Judicial Conduct and Accountability. He is meted a **FINE** in the amount of PHP 25,500.00, to be paid within three months from notice of this Decision.

The charge of gross misconduct as a member of the Philippine Bar under Canon II, Section 11 of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability is **DISMISSED**.

SO ORDERED.


AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice

³⁵ See *Anonymous Complaint Against Judge Edmundo P. Pintac*, 886 Phil. 1, 14 (2020) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

³⁶ *In Re: Petition for the Dismissal from Service and/or Disbarment of Judge Baltazar R. Dizon*, 255 Phil. 623 (1989) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*]; *Rubin v. Judge Corpus-Cabochan*, 715 Phil. 318 (2013) [Per J. Perez, Second Division]; see also *Public Assistance and Corruption Prevention Office v. Paumig*, 844 Phil. 440 (2018) [Per J. Tijam, *En Banc*].

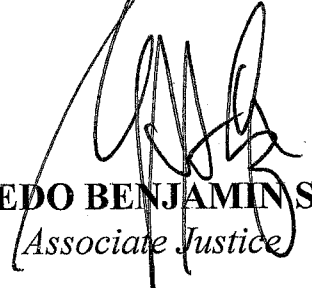
³⁷ SECTION 11. *False representations or statements; duty to correct* – A lawyer shall not make false representations or statements. A lawyer shall be liable for any material damage caused by such false representations or statements.

WE CONCUR:



ALEXANDER C. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

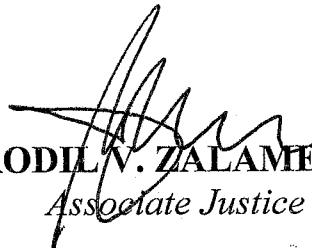
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MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Senior Associate Justice


ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice


RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

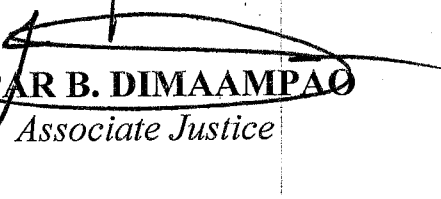

HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

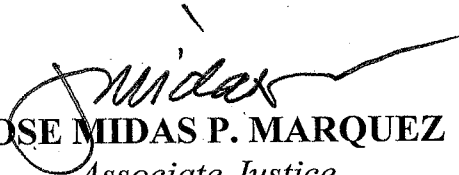

RODIL N. ZALAMEDA
Associate Justice


SAMUEL H. GAERLAN
Associate Justice


RICARDO B. ROSARIO
Associate Justice


JHOSEP V. LOPEZ
Associate Justice


JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO
Associate Justice


JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Associate Justice


ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.
Associate Justice


MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH
Associate Justice

(no part)
RAUL B. VILLANUEVA
Associate Justice