

Presidential Communications Operations Office

Presidential News Desk

MEETING OF PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE WITH EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES EXPERTS ON CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

[26 December 2020]

PRESIDENT RODRIGO DUTERTE: This meeting is called to order.

This is the Task Force that we created to confront the virus COVID-19. And what is sad is that there seems to be a new strain or a mutation --- alam ko alam ninyo 'yan, you know better than I do --- that poses another danger.

Si Sakur Tan nga sa Jolo is asking for a Navy blockade because there seems to be a new strain or a copy of that strain it has reached Singapore, then nagdududa siya na may bagong strain. They were told.

We would like to just read the statement prepared so that we would shorten the proceedings tonight.

The provincial government of Sulu has called the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) for assistance following reports that the new strain of the Coronavirus 2019 or COVID-19 has been detected in Sabah, Malaysia.

Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan on Friday told the Manila Times that he had instructed his staff to consult the Task Force on how best to handle the emerging situation.

Sabah is less than 24 --- 29 hours by boat from the Sulu archipelago. We have a porous coastlines and a vast Sulu Sea between us and Sabah, and [only] the national government is equipped with the capacity and logistics to put in place and in operation, safeguards and preemptive measures called for, Tan said.

The Sulu Task Force COVID-19 is calling on the public not to panic and to heed advisories from official sources. With our frontline partners, we will intensify our monitoring and utilize all material and human resources at our disposal to assure our constituents, [as] we reiterate our call to them to avoid speculations and spread [of] fake and harmful mongering, the governor said.

lyon akin dito, there is sentence here which says, "we all..." I'm not the only one. I'm sure everybody --- "cut short his Christmas break in Davao City to discuss with health experts a new COVID strain that supposedly originated in the United Kingdom".

lyon na lang hindi na 'yung iba. Anyway, we are the --- salient points there. The narratives that we will hear today is actually --- there is a new COVID-19 strain from the United Kingdom.

If it is a COVID-19 new, ah walang nag-iba dito unless there is a mutation or a variant of that COVID-19. Ganoon ang pagkasalita niyan.

Now, you know prudence tells us that we should confront this emerging infectious disease --- ano talaga...

We... I have allowed kasi the face-to-face classes as pilot projects all over the country. With the new strain, true or not, maybe it's true because it's being validated in Germany and South Africa, UK, eh 'yung order ko noon kay Briones that she can... *[Where is Secretary Briones?]* If she is here, I'm calling back the order and I will not allow face-to-face classes of children until we are through with this.

We have to, I said, we have to know the nature of the germ that we are confronting. Wala pa tayong alam and I cannot take the risk of allowing the children. That would be a disaster actually. So mindful of that: I am cancelling the order I gave a few days ago --- a few weeks ago --- to Secretary Briones of the Education Department to suspend everything, all activities of children, especially 'yung face-to-face classes.

We know only little of how this mutation took place, the new variant. So we would like to call on the experts to give us at least something to work on kung sakali mayroon.

Can I call the experts, medical experts, who can maybe give light to us of what we are confronting or fighting? Dra. --- Dr. Marissa M. Alejandria. She's a member of the Technical Advisory Group of COVID-19. *[Is she here?]*

DOH SECRETARY FRANCISCO DUQUE III: Mr. President...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes.

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President, with your permission, we have prepared a consolidated report coming from our experts. But before that, I will make the presentation, Mr. President, perhaps the questions can be answered by our experts whom we have invited.

But with your permission, Mr. President, can I just --- can I just have the honor of acknowledging the following experts?

Dr. Marissa Alejandria, member, Technical Advisory Group for COVID-19; Dr. Marc Edsel Ayes, the Laboratory Manager of the UP Philippine Genome Center. *[He's over there.];* Dr. Celia Carlos, Director of the RITM; Dr. Alethea De Guzman from the DOH Epidemiology Bureau; Dr. Enrique Domingo, the Director General of the FDA; Dr. Nina

Gloriani, head, Vaccine Development Expert Panel and Professor UP College of Public Health;

Dr. Teodoro “Ted” Herbosa, special adviser, NTF Against COVID-19; Dr. Jaime Montoya, Executive Director, DOST-Philippine Council for Health Research and Development; Dr. Anna Lisa T. Ong-Lim, member, TAG group for COVID-19; Dr. Cynthia Saloma, Executive Director, UP Philippine Genome Center; Dr. Mario M. Panaligan, Immediate Past President, Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases and Vice President, Philippine College of Physicians; Dr. Camilo Roa Jr., Pulmonary Medicine, Manila Doctors Hospital; Dr. Edsel Salvana, member, Technical Advisory Group for COVID-19; Dr. Rontgene Solante, chairman, Adult Infectious Disease and Tropical Medicine, San Lazaro Hospital; Dr. Socorro D. Escalante, coordinator, Acting World Health Organization Country Representative; and Dr. Troy Gepte, Public Health Epidemiologist and Consultant, Senate Committee on Health.

Again, Mr. President, we are appreciative of the presence of our various medical experts at a very short notice. And again, can I begin with my presentation, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes, just a few. If I may suggest...

SEC. DUQUE: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Since we are talking of a --- an invasion actually, of a new microbes, kindly tell the --- us how we could prevent it from entering the country if at all we can.

Mahirap ‘yan but somebody should tell us whether we should close the borders or close the entire country, that’s one. And the second is what medical interventions can we make to fight this deadly virus. So it’s yours...

SEC. DUQUE: Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. I’ll have a short presentation, Mr. President.

Again, thank you, Mr. President, sa lahat po ng ating mga eksperto na pinaunlakan ang atin pong imbitasyon. I would like to share a brief situationer sa sinasabing new variant of SARS-CoV-2 na naitala mula sa UK.

Ang paunang aksyon dito ng inyo pong IATF at mga karagdagang rekomendasyon mula sa DOH alinsunod sa payo ng atin pong mga eksperto. Ito po, ang new variant ng SARS-

COVID-2 ay --- na naitala sa United Kingdom ay sinasabing mas madaling makahawa at mabilis raw po nitong napapalitan ang predominant na strain na COVID sa Southeast Region ng UK at iba pa pong mga parte nito.

Sa UK sa ngayon ay lima hanggang sampung porsyento ng lahat ng COVID-19 specimens ay sumasailalim po sa genetic sequencing upang matukoy ang saktong strain or variant.

Sa Kent, South England ang average na sequencing coverage ay nasa four percent. Ang unang kaso na natukoy mula sa bagong variant ay noong September 20 pa.

Base sa December 13 report, nasa 1,108 na indibidwal sa England ang may COVID hango sa variant na ito.

Ayon sa mga pag-aaral sa loob ng laboratories, ang bagong mutation ay nakadagdag sa kakayanan ng virus na maka-infect ng human and animal cells. Current evidence suggests 70 percent higher transmissibility o mas mabilis na panghahawa nito.

Ngunit wala pa pong indikasyon na ang virus na ito ay nagdudulot nang mas malubhang karamdaman at maaapektuhan nito ang pagtalab ng bagong bakuna kontra COVID.

Sa ngayon, higit sa apatnapung bansa na ang nag-impose ng temporary travel restrictions until December 31 para sa mga pasahero na nagmula sa UK.

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Dahil sa inaasahang pagtaas ng mga kaso ngayong Kapaskuhan, minabuti na ng IATF na magdoble ingat at magrekomenda ng temporary travel restrictions. Alinsunod po sa IATF Resolution No. 90 na inyo pong inaprubahan noong Disyembre 23 na siyang --- lahat nang paglipad o biyahe galing sa UK ay pansamantala munang sususpendihin mula ika-24 hangga't ika-31 ng Disyembre.

Kabilang sa mga hindi makakapasok sa bansa ang lahat ng mga biyahero na nanggaling o nagdaan sa UK sa nakalipas na 14 araw. Para naman sa mga nasa biyahe na at dumating sa Pilipinas bago alas dose a-uno ng December 24, sila ay dinala po sa Clark

upang tapusin ang 14-day quarantine period ano pa man ang resulta ng kanilang RT-PCR. Ang detalye sa susunod na slide po.

Nakapagkasunduan din ang IATF na balikan at araling muli ang naturang travel restrictions bago mag-lapse ang effectivity period kaugnay na rin ang bagong risk classification na pag-uusapan po at irerekomendang muli sa inyo pong tanggapan, mahal na Pangulo.

Ito po 'yung new quarantine --- community quarantine status covering the period January 1 to 31st.

[Next slide po.]

Ito naman po ay galing sa kay Kalihim Vince Dizon. At dito po, makikita po sa mga larawan sa kanan ang protocols sa kanilang pagdating. Ito po 'yung mga galing UK o dumaan ng UK na dumating po.

Sila ay inihwalay sa ibang mga pasahero at pina-swab, prinoseso din sila ng ating immigration para ma-confirm kung sila ay mula o dumaan sa UK. Pagkatapos nito, inihatid po sila sa New Clark City para doon tapusin ang 14-day quarantine. Ang kanilang mga swab samples ay ipadadala rin sa RITM and Philippine Genome Center para sa karagdagang pagsusuri.

Ayon sa NTF report mula December 22 to 25, umabot na po sa 79 na pasahero mula UK ang dumating sa bansa; 72 ang dumating sa NAIA; habang pito ang dumating naman po via Clark. Sa 79 na nagmula po sa UK, dalawa rito ang bumalik na sa UK samantalang 77 ang nanatili dito sa Pilipinas.

Base sa report kahapon po, 59 na ang mayroon ng test results kung saan 53 ang negative ngunit may isa pong nagpositibo sa COVID at inaantabayanan natin ang 23 na natitirang resulta.

Pero 'yung testing po nito, Mr. President, hindi po nangangahulugan na ito na po 'yung new variant dahil magsasagawa pa po ng pagsusuri ang atin pong mga eksperto mula sa Philippine Genome Center.

[Next slide, please.]

Base sa mga ulat na kinalap ng WHO mula ika-28 ng Agosto hanggang ika-23 ng Disyembre, may 12 bansa sa Western Pacific Region ang nagtala ng mga imported na kaso mula sa UK. Kabilang po rito ang Hong Kong, China, Singapore, New Zealand, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Solomon Islands, Vietnam, Australia, Taiwan, and Cambodia.

Sa mga ito, tatlong bansa ang nakapagtala ng mga kaso bago sa --- base po sa bagong variant. Sa Australia ay may apat na kaso na na natuklasan habang naka-quarantine.

Sa Hong Kong ay may dalawang kaso, dalawang estudyante na edad 14 at 17. Sa Singapore naman po ay may isang kaso. Isa ring estudyante na 17 taong gulang. Sa Japan na na-detect ang new variant sa limang biyahero mula sa UK.

Samantalang wala pang kaso mula sa new variant ang naitala sa Pilipinas. Ngunit nais ko pong tukuyin ang limitasyon ng datos na ito. Ito ay mula sa mga official sites lamang kung saan ang datos ay patuloy na nagbabago o inaayos dahil sa ongoing case investigations. Mayroon ding mga naitalang imported na kaso na hindi matukoy ang pinanggalingan.

Ang atin pong recommendation --- *[Next slide, please.]* Ito po ang aming rekomendasyon, Ginoong Pangulo, habang nadaragdagan ang mga bansang nag-uulat ng detection ng UK new variant, nirerekomenda po ng DOH kasama ng mga eksperto ng TAG o Technical Advisory Group ng ating IATF at ng World Health Organization na sa mga manggagaling sa mga bansang may kumpirmadong new variant, gawing mandatory ang pagtapos ng 14-day quarantine period sa New Clark City. Ang protocol na ito ay gaya na ng ipinatupad ngayon para sa mga biyaherong dumating bago mag-alas dose a-uno, umaga ng December 24.

Ikonsidera lamang ang travel ban, Mr. President, kung nasa lebel na ng community transmission ang new variant sa naturang bansa. Lahat din ng specimens galing sa mga biyahero sa UK ay dapat pong maipadala sa PGC upang sumailalim sa genomic sequencing.

Ito naman ang ating additional action points, ilan na lang po ito, matatapos na. Ito naman po ang karagdagang complimentary action points na naitatag na rin noong nakalipas na IATF para sa lahat ng atin pong international travelers:

patuloy na pagpapatupad ng BOQ, Bureau of Quarantine, at OWWA sa quarantine at testing protocols para po sa mga papasok sa ating bansa. Sila din ay naatasang magsumite ng line list at i-endorso ang mga international travelers na papasok sa iba't ibang LGUs.

Ang DILG at LGUs naman po ay sisiguraduhin na magtatapos ng mga ini-endorsong biyahero ang kanilang 14-day quarantine sa temporary treatment and monitoring facilities o sa kanilang tahanan.

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Kinakailangan din nating palakasin ang ating kapasidad for biogenomic surveillance at i-institutionalize as a comprehensive system integrated with the current influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infection surveillance.

Kinakailangan din bigyan ng sapat na kakayanan ang ating mga subnational laboratories gaya ng RITM upang magsagawa ng biobanking o ang pagkolekta at pag-imbak ng samples para sa mga kakailanganing pag-aaral. Ang surveillance systems na ito ay importante din po sa ating pag-monitor ng vaccine effectiveness.

Para naman sa mga agarang aksyon, ang inyo pong DOH ay tutulong sa pag-identify ng mga samples na isusumite sa PGC para sa kanilang pagsusuri. Agad rin magre-report ito ng mga areas or population groups na nakitaan ng clustering at community transmission para sa gayon ay agad na makapag-conduct ng biosurveillance ang RITM, ang PGC at ang National Institutes for Health.

Ang RITM, PGC at NIH naman ay magko-conduct ng purposive sampling as part of biosurveillance kung saan uunahin ang mga samples na nakuha sa buwan ng Nobyembre at Disyembre.

Samantalang ang RITM ay naatasang mag-develop ng standard operating procedures, response protocol bilang paghahanda sa mga posibleng bagong variants at strains ng virus.

Para po magampanan ang mga tungkulin na ito, Mr. President, amin pong nire-review ang resources na ating kakailanganin at tayo po ay magsu-sumite ng request for additional budget kung kinakailangan.

So ang mga key insights or messages na lang po, nais ko pong ibahagi sa ating lahat po dito at nanggaling po sa ating mga eksperto: Una, sa paglitaw ng bagong variant na ito, mas dapat po nating paigtingin ang pagsunod sa minimum public health standards. Napaka-imporante po nitong MPHS – ang paghuhugas ng kamay, cough etiquette, pagsuot ng mask at face shield, pagdistansya ng isang metro o higit pa at panigurado na maayos ang bentilasyon or air circulation sa pagprotekta laban sa COVID-19.

Hindi lamang po tayo mapoprotektahan ng minimum public health standards sa kasalukuyang variant bagkus ang MPHS po ay kinikilalang epektibo sa kahit anong mutation or variant ng virus na ito.

At para maiwasana ang pag-mutate ng virus, kinakailangan nating mapanatiling mababa ang mga kaso sa bansa. Kung mas kaunti ang mga taong nai-infect, mas mababa rin po ang tsansa na mag-mutate ang virus.

Ikalawa, kailangan natin patuloy na pagtibayin ang kumpiyansa ng publiko sa bakuna. Dahil sa paglabas ng bagong variant, mas nagiging inclusive at equitable ang vaccine efforts sa buong mundo kaya naman dapat natin sabayan ito ng increased vaccine confidence.

Kailangan natin maging transparent sa mga efforts to secure our vaccines. Kailangan natin magbigay ng regular na updates para maiparating sa publiko na atin talagang sinisigurado na ang mga bakuna na ating pipiliin ay safe and effective.

At ito po ay gagawin natin gamit ang nagkakaisang boses ng gobyerno sa ilalim po ng inyong administrasyon. Maraming salamat po, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: We're interested to hear from General Galvez the steps they have taken so far to, I said, confront this new virus.

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER ON PEACE PROCESS AND NTF COVID-19 CHIEF IMPLEMENTER CARLITO GALVEZ JR.: Sir, at the NTF we have already coordinated with our response team and we will ano we will intensify our surveillance in the different airports.

We already informed Cebu City Airport and they were being instructed by Secretary Vince on isolating the different passengers from UK. And also all ano, all airports have been coordinated with DOTr, particularly with Ochie Tuazon, we have been coordinating with Secretary Tugade.

And with the information on the ano, the Sulu area and also in Sulu, Basilan, BASULTA area, we will --- we will ano, we will coordinate with the military through Secretary Del on how we could help the Sulu and also in Tawi-Tawi so that the intrusion of the possible -- - possible cases be prevented.

And also we forwarded already the letter of the Sulu governor to the IATF and also to DFA so that they can also arrange with Sabah and also with our post in Malaysia, sir.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: You know, General Galvez, what is very important in that area is really the control of the entry of --- of people. Whether or not they have --- they have in their bodies already the virus, that's another thing. Ang kailangan natin ikontrol 'yung borders natin.

And maybe General Lorenzana might be able to harness the assets of the Philippine Navy, additional, our patrol ships.

DND SECRETARY DELFIN LORENZANA: Yes, Mr. President. We will also ban the movement of people from Sabah to Sulu. And then we will enforce the blockade of people trying to break the blockade, sir.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: So ito ang gusto kong ma --- maitanong sa mga experts: How many mutations is possible from this COVID-19? If it can mutate and produce another variant, how many do you think this is --- this virus is capable of mutations?

Kasi maghahabol tayo dito so we just to know --- we want to know kung paano natin i --- how to really increase our surveillance dito sa baong mutation. And I said how many can this COVID-19 produce variants and mutation over time? Can somebody answer the question?

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President, may we recognize Dr. Cynthia Palmes-Saloma, the Executive Director of the UP Philippine Genome Center. Madame, you have the floor.

DR. CYNTHIA PALMES-SALOMA: Hello po, Mr. President. So far worldwide, mga 12,000 na po na mga sequence changes ang nangyari po sa 30,000 bases na genome nitong virus. Hindi naman po lahat ng mga mutations nagko-cause ng bad effects. Mayroon naman pong okay o hindi.

Ito lang po 'yung bagong variant, kasi po nag-occur siya sa spike protein na nagko-contact sa receptor ng human kaya medyo concerned po siya.

So, Mr. President, if we want to track the mutations in the Philippines, kailangan po beyond RT-PCR testing, kailangan po natin ng whole genome sequencing na 'yan po 'yung gagawin namin together with RITM and the Department of Health.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Thank you. Well, I'm glad to know that there is an agency or body that takes care of it, just in case.

Ang pangalawa, is there a need for us to prepare against --- make preparations against this new strain? Ano ang puwede? If they are, for example, passengers coming in from UK, from other places not necessarily taking the airlines from UK but others.

Papaano ito? Same control ang gagawin natin? Kay kung palabas na sila, there are those going home for the vacations for the season, dumaan muna ng ibang lugar but galing UK.

And how do we know what steps are we taking to determine these guys who are potential carriers of the new strain of COVID-19? Iyong hindi galing sa ano. People taking flights directly from UK to the Philippines, wala 'yan. So we have banned it.

But for others who are from UK or working and passing to other places and taking flights not necessarily airlines from the British territory but 'yung pauwi na, dumaan lang, nagbakasyon. Iyan ang...

SEC. DUQUE: We can ask our epidemiology bureau, Dr. Alethea De Guzman, for our answer.

DRA. ALETHEA DE GUZMAN (DOH EPIDEMIOLOGY BUREAU): Mr. President, good evening po. So tama po kayo sir 'no. We can --- we should protect not just from the flights that are coming from UK, but there should be a system in place na saan po talaga siya nanggaling whether dumaan man siya ng UK tapos nag-lay over siya somewhere.

Pero ultimately, dapat po 'pag may history of travel siya sa UK in the past 14 days, ito po 'yung mga nililimita or hindi po muna natin papasukin sa Pilipinas. So probably the Bureau of Immigration kasi makikita po nila 'yung stamp doon po sa dokumento.

At dito po 'yung samp --- tama po kayo 'no --- kailangan palakasin 'yung ano natin eh ports of entry na border control. So through BI, from BOQ para malaman at malimit ang pagpasok at kung makapasok po, mayroon tayong sistema para po ma-screen lahat ng papasok po sa atin.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Thank you.

Dr. De Guzman: Thank you rin, sir.

DOJ SECRETARY MENARDO GUEVARRA: Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Go ahead, yes.

SEC. GUEVARRA: Mr. President, according to the Bureau of Immigration, apart from flights coming directly from the United Kingdom, ang karamihan daw po ay mga flights ng United Arab Emirates. In other words, nanggagaling po sa bandang Middle East na nagta-transit sa --- or --- na dumaraan doon sa mga lugar na 'yon or transiting in the United Kingdom.

Pagdating po dito sa ating mga paliparan, ang first line of defense po ay, according to the Bureau of Immigration, ay ang paghawak ng Philippine Coast Guard para po ma-segregate 'yung mga hindi naman dumaan sa mga areas nga like the UK na possibly

infected at hinihiwalay na po sila. At dini-determine po kung sino ang kailangan na ma-quarantine at hindi. At ang last line of defense po ay ang Bureau of Immigration.

Ang deputy commissioner po ng Immigration ay present dito sa meeting na ito. Baka maaari po siyang magdagdag ng additional information or measures that have been taken by the Bureau of Immigration.

Deputy Commissioner Alegre is here and he may wish to add something to the measures taken when these foreign passengers arrive in our country.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Ito lang naman. Itanong ko lang. Do you have the sufficient manpower to do that because we have terminated so many, we dismissed so many employees of the Bureau of Immigration? Halos parang 'yung ano nila wala ng...

You know, the reason really is there would be a lot of questions asked before these passengers can be cleared. So they would have to trace from where they came from, whether they stopped over in other areas before finally taking a flight to the Philippines.

Ang gusto ko malaman kung may tao ka kasi we have terminated what? So many.

SEC. GUEVARRA: Yes, sir. Ganoon nga po ang ginagawa ng Bureau of Immigration dito sa mga foreign arrivals na 'to. They check the passports kung saan pong mga lugar nanggaling o nag-transit, at by interview also --- by intensive interview.

Going back to your question, Mr. President, we have the sufficient manpower at the Bureau of Immigration. Yes, it's true na marami na po tayong sinuspend at may mga naalis na po. Pero iyon po ay immediately pinalitan ng Bureau of Immigration from the main office at from other regional offices ng Bureau of Immigration who have sufficient training also in dealing with foreign passenger arrivals.

Kaya hindi naman po masyadong problema ang manpower sa Bureau of Immigration dahil napalitan naman po 'yung mga naalis at sa kasalukuyan po ay hindi naman masyadong heavy ang passenger traffic sa ating mga paliparan kaya po naa-address naman po ng Bureau of Immigration ang kanilang manpower situation.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Pero it's good riddance that we --- it took place during the time of a crisis like this because there is less people traveling unless otherwise the holidays are not really maybe attractive to other people.

We... I forgot the numbers that --- the numbers of your immigration people manning the desks there at the airport. We terminated how many? Forty-two, I think?

SEC. GUEVARRA: I think more than that po, Mr. President, including those who were suspended. More than 80 if I remember correctly. Probably about a hundred now, including --- I mean those who were dismissed and those who were suspended, Mr. President.

But mayroon pa naman pong available manpower coming from the other offices and regional offices ng Bureau of Immigration na puwede naman pong ilagay sa ating Manila terminals.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: You can, if need be, you can always maybe take in newcomers from the other agencies or you can increase the number by just asking people especially those --- lalo na 'yung gusto kong ipalit 'yung mga first grade eligibles sa 'yung natanggal sa --- natanggal, na-dismiss doon dahil sa "Pastillas". Marami 'yon. Eventually, it will reach a hundred siguro when the investigation is over.

But 'yung preliminary actions natin, medyo na-ano lang ako. But I now follow your trend of work that this time there is less travel and people --- take care of people. But there will be so many questions asked. Malaki ang pila diyan kung ganoon.

Well, anyway, it's a blessing in disguise that there are less people to attend to dito sa Immigration table. Secretary Duque, do you have a --- an office --- an office or agency under you working also on this --- other from UP --- working to find a vaccine? Is there a --- people there?

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President, if I may, vaccine-wise there's a process. The DOST ang nangunguna po, lead agency, sa vaccine development together with the vaccine expert panel and the Single Joint Ethics Review Board and the FDA.

So mayroon po tayo pagdating po sa pagtukoy ng mga bakuna that will be the most effective, safest and of ensured quality, Mr. President. So mayroon po tayong --- mayroon po tayong mga opisina.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: The Philippines can produce a vaccine on our own well made or manufactured out of the brainwork of people who are Filipinos. I think UP is one and DOST is working on it.

SEC. DUQUE: And the RITM, Mr. President, is also one of the best positions to collaborate with the other government agencies for a vaccine self-sufficiency goal in the --- in the near- to medium- term, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Pardon me if I remove my mask. I cannot --- I cannot pronounce the words properly, this thing is bothering me. Pagpasensiya na kayo. Wala --- hindi naman siguro --- walang hulihan naman dito. *[laughter]*

Well, there is --- no one is above the law. When it says that you are violating a certain regulation, ang problema hindi ako makapagsalita ng --- I seem to --- stammered ang bunganga ko. Well, most important thing really is to --- iyong surveillance that we are able to identify persons coming in not only from UK but from other places like Australia, mayroon na din doon, Singapore has another cases. And what is horrifying is the statement of the medical world, ng mga experts says that it can mutate very rapidly. Kaya nakakatakot eh. So if --- if --- we have to believe them because that is their --- they are the one equipped with the expertise.

So mas mabuti 'yung maniwala tayo and if it's contaminating people at a very fast rate, magkakaroon talaga tayo ng problema. So we have to increase the surveillance and of course itong quarantine kung Pilipino ang umuwi.

And I hope that it would not reach the shores of the Philippines 'yung --- 'yung variant na 'yan. Otherwise, we are in trouble because we'll just have to wait for the Western world to study and come up with solutions.

Tayo dito ano lang, we just wait and --- wait and --- wait-and-see attitude. Wala naman tayong magawa.

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Oh, yes.

SEC. DUQUE: I would just like to underscore the fact that we are not defenseless. Hindi naman po parang wala tayong laban kahit na makapasok po 'yan. Hopefully hindi makapasok pero kung makapasok naman po siya, Mr. President, please be reassured that the mechanisms, the systems, the policies are already all in place.

And what do I mean by this? We have the five strategic pillars that we have been implementing since nine, 10 months ago, and these are the prevention, using our Bida Solusyon of the DOH; Bida May Disiplina ng DILG; Seven Commandments of the DOTr; the Angat Ingat of the PCOO. And we have been drilling down relentlessly to all the communities about the importance of prevent --- preventive measures.

Number two, sir, is the early detection. The key is early detection so that we will force to all admissions of severe and critical cases, ano po. And we have already observed that the clinical management of severe to critical cases has tremendously improved over time.

And --- and that's kudos to our doctors, our clinicians, they've really improved their craft and saving lives is now what is being observed. And then kasama po sa ating early detection is active case findings, the contact tracing, testing. Our testing now is --- has increased tremendously and we have to date, tested 6.2 million Filipinos. That's about close to six percent testing coverage.

And then the aggressive isolation and quarantine, this is already in place, Mr. President. And the treatment, our hospitals have improved tremendously as I have indicated earlier. And the preparations for the new normal that has to be embraced by the local government units and in their respective communities.

But, by and large, we have made some great strides in our pandemic response. But it's far from being perfect but the results as we can see today, we have greater than almost 93 percent recovery rate. We have maintained our --- our relatively low active cases and the many gains that we have accomplished over the past several months, and we intend to build further on these gains.

And so even with the threat of new variants being confronted or rather confronting nations and we are no exception. Ang sabi nga po nila it's not a question kung darating dito --- it is going to perhaps really reach the shores --- but it's a question of when. But again, all of the systems are in place, Mr. President. So we hope that we can manage this, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: You know, if --- if true that there is a variant new, and it is now wreaking havoc on the lives of people --- one of the countries, I think, that has imposed a lockdown again is France. Kaya gusto kong malaman sa inyo kung magdating dito, are we going to impose another lockdown until we find out what we can do?

From the medical --- we invited guests. Can somebody...? So that we can prepare actually. I'm asking --- I'm making some projections. I hope that it would not really reach the Philippines. I pray and I hope. But I said we make some projections. Eh sabi mo it's not a matter of whether or not it would reach the Philippines, it will, until we decide to close the country. But that is not possible.

And so now kung magdating itong put --- itong bagong variant dito, we --- can we go back to the --- should we go back to the lockdowns again? Yeah, General Galvez what do you say?

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER ON PEACE PROCESS AND NTF COVID-19 CHIEF IMPLEMENTER GALVEZ: Sir, I believe we have a --- we have a some --- we must ano, we must apply some proactive measures particularly on DFA that they will ano, they will have an advisory particularly UK that most of our kababayan there should not go home because they will be having 'yung ano, 'yung 14 days quarantine.

Maybe also, we also discourage muna from the Europe area through ano, through maybe also with the DOTr that all ano, all air --- all ano, all passenger airlines should have a stringent --- more stringent ano --- stringent border control in terms of the ano, the --- the identities of the passengers coming in to the Philippines particularly...

Dapat, sir, mabigyan natin ng --- ng instructions, sir, 'yung mga --- recommend ko po kay Secretary Tugade to give instructions to the different airlines coming from Europe na talagang busisihin po 'yung ano, 'yung kanilang mga passport na baka mamaya doon sila nanggaling sa UK.

And maybe 'yung DFA po, sir, they have some sort of advisory na those ano, those people na mga kababayan natin sa UK for the meantime considering of the incidents of the ano, the mutation of a new --- new ano, sir, new variant, na dapat din i-discourage po natin na ano, na 'wag muna sir bumalik dito sa Pilipinas.

And then also tama po kayo, sir, na dapat magkaroon tayo ng active surveillance through the LGU dahil hindi po natin alam na... Ang nagkaroon lang tayo ng ano, ng tinatawag nating order was only last December 23. Baka hindi po natin alam na may nakapasok na po noong mga naunang mga buwan.

And we should ano, we should have some sort of discreet investigation using also 'yung ating Armed Forces at saka 'yung PNP na baka may mga balikbayan na nanggaling ng

UK na nandoon na po sa mga areas. So we need really to ano, to have 'yung active surveillance at lalo na po 'yung mga nakadating na po dito.

Based po sa ano, sa text po ni Sec. Liling na nandoon po sa Singapore 'yung kanyang anak, mayroon na pong isang identified na strain sa Singapore. And it was already confirmed sa ano po, sa anak po ni Sec. Liling na nandoon po.

So maybe ang mangyayari din po 'yung mga ibang mga countries like Japan na mayroon ng lima ngayon, it may ano, it may happen na talagang ano po natin... Ang isang ano po natin na puwede po nating gawin po, sir, is talagang mag-designate tayo ng quarantine - -- special quarantine area for those will be ano, will be later identified na ano po para po talagang ma-isolate nating mabuti.

Kasi 'yon po, time will come talaga na, Mr. President, na baka magkaroon po talaga ng strain dito, we should be prepared kung saan po natin ilalagay 'yung mga tao po na para ma-isolate po natin sila lahat. So 'yon lang po, mahal na Pangulo.

SEC: LORENZANA: Mr. President, Mr. President, can I make a comment, sir?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: General Lorenzana?

SEC: LOERENZANA: On your question, sir, na if we have to tighten the lockdown, I think the IATF should put a threshold kung ilan iyong araw-araw na lumalabas na ano --- then we may be able to --- we'd might enforce again a tighter lockdown, sir. Kailangan may threshold tayo.

Kung bababa lang siya ng 2,000 below or maybe 3,000 siguro but it will be the IATF siguro, Secretary Duque, 'no. Mag-usap tayo para 'yung threshold para automatic lockdown tayo. Thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Well, actually, iyang lockdown is a possibility. I said we are making some projections but if the severity in numbers would demand that we take corrective measure immediately, then we just have to go back to the lockdown.

'Pagka rumami sila, with the new strain, then in the meantime that we are not able to confront them effectively --- I mean the virus --- we'll just have to... Tama 'yan, it depends on the severity in number. Kasi 'pagka marami na, and we do not have the antidote on how to kill those variants, we'll be having a problem there and of course we would also be hard-pressed on looking for the money for the expenses in the meantime, magastos 'yan.

Yes, General Año?

DILG SECRETARY EDUARDO AÑO: As of now, Mr. President, our situation in the country is manageable if we are just talking on the local COVID situation. But we have really to --- to guard or to watch out is the international borders because the variants or the new strain is coming from those identified countries.

Kung mababantayan po natin iyong --- 'yung ating international ports kung pupuwede, ma-embudo natin sila sa one or two international ports lang. And tulad po ng sabi ni Secretary Galvez, puwede tayo sa quarantine facilities, then we can isolate 'yung situation on the local and find --- if there is anyone na who's able to pass through, 'yon po 'yung hahanapin natin.

Right now, there's no necessity to call for a lockdown but probably more on --- on controlling the --- the flow from the international. If ever, probably we may not have to declare lockdown in the country but we may have to close the border if there is a real situation that would occur later on.

So for the quarantine naman, sir, we'll make sure that the LGUs... We'll see to it that anyone who --- who gets contact with a person coming from UK or from the four countries enumerated, iku-quarantine po sila kahit home quarantine just ensure na hindi sila makakagalaw. That way I think we can --- we can control the --- the situation.

DOTR SECRETARY ARTHUR TUGADE: Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes, Secretary Tugade.

SEC. TUGADE: Noon hong... Thank you very much, Mayor President. Noon hong naglabas ng protocol at guidelines ang IATF saka ang DOH, nag-zero in ho tayo sa UK.

From December 22 hanggang ngayon, zero in tayo sa UK. Noong naglabas ho ang IATF ng protocol, rine-visit and strengthen namin sa DOTr iyong tinatawag ho namin na one-stop shop sa pamunuan ng OTS (Office of Transport Security) si General Raul Del Rosario.

Kaya nga ba't noong December 22, nalaman namin na ang pumasok from UK dalawang pasahero; December 23, 54 passengers; December 24, six passengers; December 25, 17 passengers. Sa kabuuan, mayroon hong suma total, kagaya ng rineport ni Secretary Duque, 79 passengers. Out of the 79 passengers, nanggaling ho 'yan 72, nanggaling sa NAIA. Seven lang ho iyong sa Clark.

Doon ho sa 79, dalawa ho 'yung umuwi, mag-asawa. Ibig sabihin, pumasok ng Maynila, hindi na nagtagal, using the same flights sa Emirates, bumalik sa London kasi 'yung asawa na-brief ayaw pumunta sa Clark.

Isa lang ho ang positive so far at inaantay iyong resulta natin sa mga 23 passengers. Ang ibig hong sabihin lang ho is nagze-zero in tayo sa UK. Iyong report kanina ho ni Secretary Duque, parang nasasabi niya na kailangan lawakan natin nang kaunti iyong pagsipat natin ng mga pasaherong hindi lang nanggagaling sa UK. Tingnan din natin iyong ibang bansa na kung saan mayroon na iyong bagong strain ng COVID kasi iyong bagong strain COVID ay mabilis 'yung kontaminasyon at mas malawak.

Having said this, Mr. President, siguro importante at bigyang tugon at pansin natin short of or in preparation of lockdown, 'yung rekomendasyon ni Secretary Duque kanina na silipin natin 'yung ibang lugar na kung saan mayroon nitong bagong strain ng COVID.

Nandadiyan 'yung Australia, nandadiyan 'yung Singapore, hindi ko maalala 'yung ibang lugar. Siguro dapat tingnan na 'yan. Kailangan ho mapalawak natin 'yung Bureau of Quarantine, 'yung Department of Health sa airport with the one-stop shop.

Ginawa ho natin sa UK 'yan. Gagawin natin sa 'pag dinagdag na 'yung ibang lugar. Mayroon lang ho akong katanungan na gusto kong tanungin sa ating mga medical experts. Klaro ho, Mr. President, na 'pag ang pasahero galing sa loob ng bansa na mayroong strain, klaro ho na mayroon kang stringent quarantine protocols.

Imaginin (imagine) natin at isipin natin na lahat 'yung nagbibiyaha, minsan hindi ho direct flight. Mayroon 'yung tinatawag na transit. Ibig sabihin ho, dumaan lang doon. Dalawang klase ho 'yung transit. Iyong transit ho, pumunta sa airport, inantay 'yung connecting flight, pero galing sa lugar na mayroong COVID --- new COVID-19 strain. Tanong: Gaano katagal sila dapat sa airport bago mo i-impose iyong strict quarantine? Ito ho 'yung nasa airport lang.

Pangalawa na gusto kong tanungin sa medical experts is: Will the rules be the same if ang stopover mo or transit mo may kasamang layover? Ibig sabihin natulog sa lugar --- doon sa lugar at kinuha 'yung connecting flight.

Ano iyong protocol at requirements na gagawin natin diyan? Magkaiba ho 'yan kasi 'yung strain na sinasabi ho nila, Mr. Mayor President, sir, is malawak ang contamination at mabilis.

So, klaro 'pag galing ka sa isang lugar at doon ka nagmula, how will you treat the transient passengers now considering that there are two kinds of transiting passengers: one that waits for their flight in the airport and how long will this be allowed or tolerated; and the other is transiting, mayroong layover. Ibig sabihin natulog sa hotel iyan bago kinuha 'yung connection.

I'd like to get the views of the medical experts.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Iyan 'yung sinabi ko kanina, Art,

SEC. TUGADE: Sir?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Iyan ang sinabi ko kanina...

SEC. TUGADE: Opo. Gusto ko pong marinig sa kanila ano iyong opinyon para ma-guide din kami how to address these transiting passengers coming from countries where there is a strain considering that the strain is, again --- in the words of the medical expert --- deeply and widely contaminatable. Ayan, ano ho dapat 'yung patakaran natin diyan?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Where... We should ask the medical guys.

SEC: DUQUE: Mr. President, with your permission, we would like to recognize Dra. Issa Alejandria of the Technical Advisory Group of --- Group of IATF.

Ma'am?

DR. MARISSA ALEJANDRIA (PHILIPPINE SOCIETY OF MICROBIOLOGY AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES): Thank you. Good evening po, Mr. President.

Regarding the question of Secretary Tugade, napag-agree-han po naming mga experts --- medical experts that with regards to the travelers coming from any country with the reported UK variant, whether transit or coming directly, the quarantine will remain as 14 days --- strict implementation of 14 days.

And regardless actually of whether we're dealing with a variant or mutation or the regular COVID-19, the quarantine --- duration of quarantine remains at 14 days. We need to strictly implement the 14 days.

Siguro we would like also to clarify, the mode of transmission remains the same, respiratory droplet, and this virus, we expect the mutations. So we... To impose a lockdown or travel restriction will not be sustainable in the long run.

So kailangan pa rin po 'yung implementation ng minimum public health standards: face masks, face shield as discussed earlier, cough etiquette, hand washing, air circulation, then 'yung quarantine.

Whether there is a mutation or not, these are still the standards that have to be implemented. And this virus also, 'yung variant po, there is no evidence at this time or data that shows that it causes the more severe form or it's more virulent.

Mas mabilis lang 'yung transmission pero hindi siya nagko-cause nang mas severe disease that will cause critical form of the disease or more hospitalizations. Sa ngayon, hindi pa 'yon nakikita. Mas mabilis lang ang transmission kasi nag-mutate nga doon sa protein kung saan iyon 'yung nag-a-attach sa virus sa loob ng katawan.

So iyon po 'yon. Kaya we expect the mutations to come kasi that's the natural evolution kasi ng virus. It's their way of survival as they replicate, they mutate, but not all mutations are significant.

So so far 'di ba last July, 'yung first mutation 'yung D614G na pumasok na sa atin 'yon kaya nagkaroon tayo ng surge noong August. And then this time, we are trying to prevent the entry of the UK variant.

And tama po 'yung ginagawa natin ngayon na we're restricting travelers coming from UK and we also need to check on other travelers coming from other countries where the variant is also reported. Kaya may plans po ng surveillance --- biosurveillance ang Philippine Genome Center, RITM, NIH, together with DOH, para ma-monitor natin 'yung mga pumasok na variant.

So we need to set up, strengthen the biosurveillance system so that we are on top of the situation 'no. Aware tayo na may pumasok na variants and these variants are important to be monitored kasi may impact din sa vaccines --- sa efficacy ng vaccines natin --- or effectiveness ng vaccines, eventually.

So in the --- moving forward, kailangang ma-set up or ma-strengthen 'yung biosurveillance system. And para malaman natin kung mayroon na ngang UK variant dito, 'yung November-December samples natin ay i-a-analyze ng Philippine Genome Center and RITM.

Iyon po, Mr. President.

SEC. TUGADE: Mr. President, sir. Just... Number one is a clarification. So I take it then that whether you come from the city or state where there is a new strain or from the airport lang, you're taking a transient character, strict. That is for passenger at para sa tao.

Ang tatanungin ko lang ho, kasi Transport ako, what will be the rules for cargoes? Kasi gaya nung meeting natin noon, kung may transmission sa cargoes, will the rule of the game be the same with people and cargo? I'd like to listen with the permission of the Mayor President with the medical experts.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Let me go back to itong transit. Some are taking flights and then connecting. Kung wala ng iba, there are countries whose airline make flights to the Philippines. Ang iba naman talagang layover, he has to spend the night there.

Alam mo, ang tingin ko diyan whether or not it is a transit situation or a layover, para sa akin it's the same. The virus is carried by people and maski na doon sa sinasabi natin na transit, they have to deal with people whether they like it or not. They have to go out and go to the counter and talk to people.

So ang virus, whether in transit or just a connecting flight for the following day, ganoon rin ang ano eh. So I think that 'yung response natin should really be we consider them as one. We lock them as one.

Now, itong scenario, naunahan mo lang ako. I'd like to ask Secretary Duque and DOST. [*Nandito ba si Boy?*] I'd like them to --- or government itself, the offices, should create another task force. Hindi itong atin. Wala man tayong alam diyan. Nakatut --- medical.

Ideally, it should be medical persons na nakatutok lang talaga diyan sa bagong strain whether or not it is here or not and whether it is as virulent as the itong sabi naman ni doktora, hindi masyado. It's not as toxic as itong si COVID-19 --- si original, 'yung tatay.

So... But I think that we should not really be complacent about it. We should treat them as a deadly disease that would be entering the Philippines. Mahirap kasi 'yang mag-ano tayo whether or not itong ano na ito as virulent or as toxic as COVID-19.

So iyong sa tanong mo, para sa akin, pareho. The contact is there. The possibility of contact is there because we have to talk to people and in the transit, there are a lot of locals also there working. The policemen, the security guards are there.

And while waiting, I said they are in a room that maybe somebody, somehow, would pass it on to a Filipino coming home.

Let's go back to your... Mamaya na lang. Tapusin muna natin ito. How about the cargo that are contaminated?

SEC. TUGADE: Klaro po, Mr. Mayor President, sa tao. How to deal with them either coming directly from the state or from the airport, trapo. Gusto kong malaman sa medical

expert, papaano natin ititreat 'yung cargo kung especially if this virus is mabilis maka-contaminate? Para ma... Apektado ho ba 'yung cargo? Para ma-guide kami sa pakikipag-usap namin sa mga airlines, sa airport operators sa cargo.

Noon po, iyong COVID-19, sabi natin transmission: animal sa tao, tao sa tao. Question 'yung cargo. Hanggang after a while, naklaro na cargo becomes a contaminating platform.

Dito ho sa bagong strain na ito kung if it becomes a contaminating platform at mabilis maka-spread, kailangan ho bang maging mas strict ako sa mga cargo ngayon, sa mga pumapasok sa airport or sa adwana considering that this new strain is very contaminating?

SEC: **DUQUE:** Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes.

SEC: DUQUE: If I may, the existing disinfection protocols must be followed and ipagpatuloy niyo lang 'yon, and I think it's going to be safe enough. If you want to double the disinfection process, it will not harm, it will only do good. So whatever you have done, you can just you know, perhaps ramp it up a little bit more.

SEC. TUGADE: Lahat po na ginagawa ngayon, 'yung spraying, 'yung kuwan is supisyente na ngayon 'yon?

SEC. DUQUE: Tama po kayo, 'yung ginagamit lang po diyan ay chlorine-based disinfecting chemical.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Why? Art, is there no fumigation being done?

SEC. TUGADE: Sir, noong nag-umpisa 'yung COVID sa mga airport, sa mga pier, mayroon ho 'yung spray contamination sa mga cargo eh. Ngayon ho, tinatanong ko because of the nature of the new strain. Will there be a need to put stronger contaminating spray or you know --- ? I want to hear from them so that we will know how we can react and deal with the airlines and the port operators.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Well, if they are potential carriers of the strain, even baggages, that is your problem. Try to find a solution for that.

Fumigation or whatever, spraying, that would fall under your worry.

SEC. TUGADE: Kasi po 'yung isang puwede nating gawin, Secretary Duque, Mr. President, sir, remember mandatory quarantine itong mga pasahero? 'Wag na natin

pabitbit 'yung bagahe nila papunta sa kuwan --- kunin 'yung bagahe, we can do a process there 'pag tapos na iyong quarantine nila para nang sa ganoon naka-hold din 'yung cargo.

Hindi naman kailangan isama nila doon sa kuwan 'yan unless 'yung mga hand-carry na may essentials. I don't know. Again, it depends on the depth and extent of the contamination kuwan of the new strain.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: That is a good suggestion. Not even a suggestion. That is a good plan, actually. Prohibit them from carrying the --- the cargoes. But that is an added burden to sa inyo but they have to be...

SEC. TUGADE: Actually, sir, I think Secretary Bello will confirm this. Tumatagal 'yung proseso sa airport kasi kinukuha nila 'yung bagahe, dinadala kung saan sila naka-quarantine na hotel.

Baka mas maganda niyan na iyong hand-carry lang nila ang dadalhin nila, carrying some essentials, maiiwan 'yung ibang kargamento that will also facilitate the movement inside the airport while you put additional quarantine precaution to the cargo as they are doing their mandatory quarantine. This is an off the cuff, a knee-jerk reaction to the discussion.

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President, we have the expert back to Dr. Alejandria for her comment to the issue. Thank you, Mr. President.

DRA. ALEJANDRIA: With all due respect po, we don't need to quarantine din po 'yung baggage and cargo. The usual standard disinfection procedures would suffice whether there's a mutation or not kasi ang transmission pa rin po, the main driver of transmission is respiratory droplet.

'Pag umubo, talking loudly, singing loudly, close distance, 'yon, that's when the droplets are spread and enter the body. So, hindi --- it's not necessary to quarantine the cargo. So the usual disinfection measures using chlorine would suffice.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: There is... What you would really want to say is that there is no scientific --- hard scientific findings that itong inanimate things can be carriers of the disease.

DRA. ALEJANDRIA: Opo. Yeah. Yes po.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE: Mr. President...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Secretary Roque...

SEC. ROQUE: Mayor, bago lang po magtanong pa tayo sa mga technical experts, nag-text lang po si Secretary Leonor Briones, and I will quote, "We will implement the

President's instructions to recall limited face-to-face classes in the line of recent development."

So, hindi daw po nila itutuloy na iyong face-to-face pilot 'no. At ang pangalawang punto ko lang po, napansin ko po walang mga taga-economic team natin dito, but I think if some of them were here, they will say na 'yung tayo po ay nag-lockdown, it was really to prepare our healthcare system.

So, siguro po if we are sure that this will become more virulent, although mababa po ngayon ang ating occupancy rate pagdating po sa ating mga isolation facilities, sa ating mga ward beds, at sa ating mga ICU beds, maybe we should now take steps to even add more 'no, maski mababa pa po 'yung utilization natin just in case talaga nga pong napaka-virulent nitong bagong strain. Maraming salamat po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes, Secretary Nograles.

CABINET SECRETARY KARLO ALEXEI NOGRALES: Thank you, Mr. President.

So, para lang maintindihan natin 'to, Mr. President, it seems like what the experts are saying and correct me if I'm wrong, iyong mutation lang ng virus is mas naging --- the mutation made the virus stickier lang. Right? Because you're saying 'yung pang --- iyong --- 'yung characteristic ng virus na kumapit is now stickier. Is that what the experts are saying, that's why tumaas ang virulence niya because of the ano niya --- 'yung pagdikit niya sa mga cells ng tao is because nandoon 'yung protein that made it stickier? Ganoon ba 'yon?

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President, if I may, the current strain that has been the subject of our discussions has not been proven to have increased virulence. Only increase in transmissibility, mabilis lang maghawa but the virulence or the extent --- the pathogenicity is the same, basically, with our current strain.

So, hindi naman siya mas grumabe o mas serious 'yung kanyang sakit na idinudulot, mas mabilis lang po. So mas mabilis lang siyang makahawa.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Mayroon dito na I think we are updated well. Spain, the government reported the first confirmed the variant of cargo.

Pumasok talaga doon despite of their... They would once closing the border also. Takot 'yung mga ano...

So, let's do it this way. We will assume, as it will really happen, we will assume that the new strain will arrive in the Philippines. We cannot --- unless I said you close the country, papasok talaga 'yan.

So let us proceed on that premise that this strain will... That's why I said a task force so that we would be advised immediately or in advance.

Papasok iyan dito so ang ating ano ngayon is iyon ang ano --- iyong quarantine. Tapos sabi ni ma'am ano --- doktora --- na 'yung namang hindi naman dumidikit sa inanimate things so sa bagay hindi magdikit, it will not thrive.

It will not --- it will die if it sticks to the cargo and kung may fumigation diyan, Art, sa iyo, fumigate lang. If you burst of itong whatever chemical that's appropriate for the cleansing of the cargo. Bilisan mo lang 'yung ano... Just for good measure. That's about it. For good measure let us do it.

Now, Secretary Bello has something to say. Ikaw 'yung pinakamaraming kliyente diyan eh. Eh iyong OFW.

DOLE SECRETARY SILVESTRE BELLO III: Ah, yes, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: They come in numbers.

SEC. BELLO: I was also toying with the idea na kasi ang ano --- ang IATF resolution is to prevent the entry of foreigners coming from UK at ina-allow 'yung mga OFWs.

I think, Mr. President, it is also good to consider na isama na rin sa restriction even 'yung mga OFWs natin kasi it is reported by our labor attachés, Mr. President, that some of our OFWs, especially in UK, have been contaminated by this variant COVID-19, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: No wonder. It's a very natural if you see --- if you are in a community that is affected by these p*** itong ano --- pardon.

If a community is affected and you are there, naturally if there are Filipino nurses, most of them, connected with the medical profession, ganoon rin mangyari... So whether or not they would eventually they would come home and bring the --- we cannot escape that. I abhor the idea of 'yung hindi mo pauwiin. As long as doon sa place of departure, they are tested perhaps when they come home, they're tested again and quarantined, if that is really the purpose of the government.

I would not agree with the idea of disallowing Filipinos to come home. Mahirap iyan unless we have --- we can prove that he is contaminated. But if the test shows from the place of departure pati dito at the same protocol naman iyan eh, swabbing pati --- and they are quarantined, at least sigurado.

Akin lang --- my take is Filipinos coming home, we'll just have to gamble. We have to gamble that hopefully that they are not the carriers. But iyong British foreigners, gusto ko sila huwag munang pumasok. Kung mahawa lang naman tayo Pilipino 'pag mahawa tayo ng puti, ah that is a disaster. So sarado talaga ang Pilipinas...

SEC. BELLO: Mr. President, ang problema kasi Mr. President, 'yung mga manggagaling sa UK and other parts of Europe ito 'yung mga magbabakasyon lang, Mr. President, hindi ito 'yung mga displaced because of COVID-19.

Kasi karamihan ng mga OFWs natin who were displaced because of COVID-19 opted to stay because they're enjoying 'yung kanilang insurance benefits. Ang insurance benefits kasi ng mga workers in Europe is more than one year hindi kagaya sa atin dito na two months lang.

Doon, ang unemployment insurance ng mga workers is 14 months kaya they can afford to stay and wait for the possibility of going back to normalcy kaya karamihan ng mga umuwi galing from UK are for vacation, Mr. President. Kaya kung 'yon ang purpose lang naman nila eh huwag na natin na lang silang pauwiin.

And by the way, Mr. President, kakaunti lang naman 'yung manggagaling diyan sa UK and other parts of Europe. Karamihan nung mga nare-repatriate ni Secretary Tugade, numbering from 1, 500 to 3,000 a day galing ito sa Asia and the Middle East countries, Mr. President. Kaya 'yang mga Europe...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Ang --- hindi. Hanggang ngayon ba ang --- the numbers are steady? You have the average Filipinos...?

SEC. TUGADE: Yes, Mr. Mayor-President. We can submit those numbers. I don't have them now but I can submit it first --- first hour even tomorrow, Sunday, I can give it to you.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: No need, no need. We just have to know because the experts are here.

SEC. TUGADE: Okay, okay.

SEC. DUQUE: Mr. President...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: After our discussion, we'll ask them.

SEC. TUGADE: Opo.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Ang pasok ba ng ano is the --- may ano ka, may numbers ka that's...

SEC. TUGADE: Mayroon po, mayroon.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Pareho lang?

SEC. LORENZANA: Mr. President...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: The volume.

SEC. TUGADE: The one-stop shop is doing this on a regular basis, your honor.

SEC. LORENZANA: Mr. President, Mr. President, may I butt in please, sir?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes.

SEC. LORENZANA: Yes, sir. I have here the record of arrivals from December 21. December 21 – 1, 477; December 22 – 1, 411; December 23 – 1, 900; December 24 – 1,400; and yesterday - 968. So we are hovering between 1,500 to up to --- below 2,000, Mr. President, for the OFWs.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: You have the --- may average ka?

SEC. LORENZANA: I think it's about 1, 500, sir.

SEC. TUGADE: Now, mayroon tayong cap, Sec. Nasa 4, 500 ngayon and we are planning to increase that, Mr. Mayor, President by the end --- at the start of January to 5,000 if IATF will confirm those numbers. May cap ho tayo diyan.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: I hate to --- I hate to do this but can we suspend this meeting for just about mga 30 minutes so that we can eat? I think the food is there. Mine was brought here.

Session suspended. You guys, you get your food. I don't know where. Saan ba pagkain?

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