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PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE
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SEC. ROQUE: Magandang tanghali, Pilipinas.

Naku po, napakagandang balita po ‘no sa unang araw ng linggong ito ‘no: Sa wakas po, parating na po ang ating mga bakuna! Natapos na po iyong huling hadlang para magamit natin ang Sinovac para sa ating mga kababayan.

Inaprubahan na po ng Food and Drug Administration or FDA ang Emergency Use Authorization or EUA ng Sinovac, at kinakailangan lamang ng gobyerno ng Tsina ng tatlong araw mula ngayong araw na ito kung kailan naaprubahan ang EUA para maparating sa atin ang Sinovac.

Ang sabi po sa akin ni Secretary Vince Dizon, ang ating Deputy Chief Implementer ng NTF, ay isang araw lang naman ang kinakailangan natin so sa pang-apat na araw ay baka pupuwede na. Pero—ayaw ko na pong mag-promise baka may mangyari na naman – pero asahan po natin na wala na pong matagal na delay para magsimula ang ating bakuna. Pasensiya na po kayo, naantala ng mga ilang araw lang naman ‘no, dahil ako naman po sa mula’t mula ay nanindigan na ang talagang unang gagamitin natin ay ang Sinovac o ang Chinese vaccine.

Pangalawa po ‘no, nagdesisyon na po ang Presidente ha, wala pa rin po tayong face-to-face classes sa bansa. Tumawag po kagabi ang Presidente sa akin at ang sabi niya, ayaw po niyang malagay sa panganib o alanganin ang buhay ng ating mga mag-aaral at mga guro habang wala pa pong nababakunahan sa bansa. Sabi niya, may awa po ang Panginoon, baka naman po pagkatapos nating malunsad ang ating vaccination program ay pupuwede na tayong mag-face-to-face sa Agosto ‘no lalung-lalo na doon sa mga lugar na mababa po ang COVID cases.

Okay. Nasa Pilipinas po ang Bagyong Auring na mula tropical storm ay humina at naging tropical depression ‘no. As of February 22, 2021, situation report ng NDRRMC, mayroong 13,816 families or 52,236 persons ang naapektuhan sa 216 barangay sa Region X, XI at CARAGA. Sa bilang na ito, nasa 12,825 families or 49,236 persons ang pansamantalang nananatili sa 308 evacuation centers. Mahigit kalahating milyon or 510,158 pesos halaga ng tulong ang naibigay sa mga apektadong pamilya sa mga probinsiya ng Agusan del Norte, Surigao del Norte at Surigao del Sur sa CARAGA as of February 22, 2021.

Sa COVID update naman po tayo, ito ang world rankings by country ayon sa World Health Organization at Johns Hopkins as of February 22, 2021: Total cases na 561,169, Number 31 pa rin po ang Pilipinas sa mundo. Sa active cases na 26,238, Number 45 po ang Pilipinas sa buong mundo – bumaba po tayo from Number 41, Number 45 na po tayo.

SA COVID cases naman per one million population, mayroon po tayong 510.39, Number 135 po tayo – hindi po gumalaw. Pero sa case fatality rate po ‘no, medyo tumaas po ang ating case fatality rate, naging 2.2 at naging Number 60 tayo from Number 67.

Mayroon po tayong 26,238 na mga aktibong kaso ayon sa February 21, 2021 datos ng DOH. Sa mga aktibong mga kaso, 93.3% ay mild at asymptomatic, nasa 3% ang kritikal, at 2.8% ang severe. Higit kalahating milyon or 522,843 po ang kabuuang bilang ng mga gumaling or 93.2% recovery rate.

Samantalang malungkot naming binabalita na gaya ng aking sinabi po na ang mga namatay sa coronavirus ay 12,088 na po. Nakikiramay po kami. Ito po ay 2.15% na fatality rate.

Kumustahin naman natin ang mga lagay ng ating ospital – okay naman po ‘no. Ang mga ICU beds, mayroon pa tayong 62% available; ang ating isolation beds, mayroon pa po tayong 68% available; ang ating ward beds, mayroon pa tayong 77% available; at ang ating ventilators ay mayroon pang 79% available.

Okay, kasama po natin ngayon ang Philippine Ambassador to Russia Carlos Sorreta, para bigyan tayo ng update kung kailan naman po darating ang Gamaleya Russian vaccine na napabalita na 91% daw po ang efficacy rate.

Ambassador Sorreta, kailan po sa tantiya ninyo matatapos ang proseso ng EUA para maparating na po natin ang mga bakuna galing sa Russia? Mayroon na ba ho tayong napirmahan man lang na term sheet at kailan po kaya natin mapipirmahan ang supply agreement? The floor is yours, Ambassador Sorreta.

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Magandang tanghali, Secretary Harry. Magandang tanghali po sa inyong lahat.

Mayroong—very advanced na ho iyong discussions natin on a technical level with Russia. And right now, hinihintay lang natin ang additional information, technical data na hiningi ng Philippines. At kapag nakuha na iyon, I think that’s the final step for our FDA to make a decision. And once they make a decision, the Russian side is ready to sit down and sign, which they have done already with 30 countries, and there are 50 other counties lined up. So I think that’s the next step. It’s hard to give a hard date on it, but we’re constantly asking ho ang ... for the follow up on this information from the Russian side.

SEC. ROQUE: Oho. Ambassador, bago po umalis iyong dating Russian Ambassador to the Philippines ay nagsabi siya na gusto pa nga nila po na dito mag-manufacture ng kanilang mga bakuna. Mayroon na po bang updates dito sa interest ng mga Ruso na dito mag-manufacture ng kanilang bakuna sa Pilipinas?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Mayroon silang polisiya na gusto nilang mag-partner sa ibang bansa. They've already partnered with at least six countries for local production, and that includes countries like South Korea and India.

I understand that there are also discussions with our private sector with the Russian private ... the propriety side of the Russian state enterprises. So I think if we are willing to, and I have no doubt that we are able to – we have the capability, we have the great people and expertise. Pero ang priority ngayon ay iyong obtaining supplies from the Russian side, and it's important to be able to put our order soon kasi ginagawa iyong pagdating ng order eh. So hopefully, it will happen soon enough.

SEC. ROQUE: Huling katanungan na lang po 'no. Narinig ko po si Dr. Domingo ng FDA na nagsasabi na mayroon lang mga challenges pagdating sa translation at saka iba kasi iyong proseso ng pag-a-approve ng bakuna diyan sa Russia kung ikukumpara dito sa Pilipinas 'no. Mayroon ba ho tayong hakbang na ginagawa sa ating embahada para matulungan na iyong Gamaleya na masumite lahat po ng mga kinakailangang isumite sa FDA nang sa gayun po ay lumabas sa lalong mabilis na panahon ang kanilang EUA dito sa Pilipinas?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Yes, the translation is not—I think there were initial issues, but I think that's been solved. Kasi ho iyong data naman na binibigay sa lahat ng bansa, it's in language that they understand. So I think that's been solved, and we're just waiting for—in fact, na-process na iyong initial information kaya humihingi pa ng additional ang ating FDA.

I think we are at that point na once a decision is a made and approval is done, if it's done, and we decide to proceed, could be readily available. And turnaround time medyo mabilis, mga—in fact, they are supplying 30 countries now, like I said so... if we make a decision soon and give the approval, I think the vaccines can come in a fairly quick amount of time.

SEC. ROQUE: Sir, mayroon na ba kayong linya na binuksan para kay Dr. Domingo para kung ano ang kinakailangan na tulong ng FDA ay makatulong na po ang ating embahada diyan sa Russia?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Yes, there's a group that's working on this and we are in a direct touch with them, along formal and informal lines. And we are trying our best to move things along. The Russian embassy rin ho sa Pilipinas is doing everything it can to help out in this process. Right now, it's just at a technical level I believe.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Maraming salamat, Ambassador Sorreta. Please join us for our open forum baka marami pong tanong sa atin ang ating kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps.

So simulan na po natin ang ating open forum, Usec. Rocky.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Good afternoon, Secretary Roque. Good afternoon, Ambassador Sorreta.

Tanong from Evelyn Quiroz of Pilipino Mirror: The IATF recommended that the President place the country under the more relaxed Modified General Community Quarantine. What do you think will be the President's decision on the matter?

SEC. ROQUE: I cannot second guess the President [signal cut] he meant what he said. Let's discuss it collegially again and—pero sa akin po ang tingin ko, inaabangan pa rin niya siyempre iyong data analytics.

USEC. IGNACIO: Question for Ambassador Carlos Sorreta: Russia's incoming envoy to Manila discussed the possible distribution of his country's COVID-19 vaccine in the Philippines in a meeting recently with you. What has become of this talk?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Thank you, Usec., nice to see you again. Like I said, there's been progress on a technical level and I wouldn't think myself expert enough to understand that. But what I know is there's been active exchanges and the point where there's just another set of data that we need and I am making sure that this data gets to us in a form that it can be processed. And then after that if we place an order, production can begin. Hindi kasi off the shelf ang vaccine, it has to be produced once the orders are in—I mean, once the contracts are signed and this would be right now a government-to-government. Gamaleya is the only one producing as a government; the other vaccines around the world are essentially private.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Ambassador. For Secretary Roque, from Jam Punzalan of ABS-CBN, follow up po niya: The OCTA Research Group said if Metro Manila is under MGCQ and hit by the same variant that affected Cebu City, it would take only 36 days for the region to return to its COVID-19 situation back in August 2020 when an average of 2,400 cases were reported per day.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, wala po akong reaksiyon diyan. Unang-una, ang datos na tinitingnan po natin ay datos ng Department of Health na ginagamit din ng OCTA Research 'no. Pangalawa, sabi ko nga po, ayaw kong pangunahan ang ating Presidente.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Mela Lesmoras, please.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Hi! Good afternoon po, Secretary Roque. My first question lang po, follow up lang po sa Sinovac vaccines. Since sabi ng FDA ito ay para sa—ideal para sa 18 to 59 years old na healthy people. Paano po kaya ito... hindi po pasok dito si Pangulong Duterte? Sino po kayang mga Cabinet members iyong willing na maunang magpaturok nito para sa vaccine confidence? Kayo po ba Secretary Roque ay willing pong magpauna dito?

SEC. ROQUE: Naku, handang-handa na po ako. Kung papayagan po ako ng Presidente at papayagan ako ng National Task Force, magpapauna po tayo.

Pero maski hindi mo na tinanong, sasagutin ko na 'no. Anong mangyayari dahil nagkaroon ng dalawang kondisyon po iyong ating EUA ng Sinovac na hindi pupuwedeng gamitin muna sa mga seniors at hindi pupuwedeng gamitin muna sa healthcare workers?

Well, magpupulong po iyong tinatawag na NITAG 'no – ang NITAG po iyong National Immunization Technical Advisory Group. Sila po iyong bumuo ng list of priorities at ang mangyayari po diyan eh siguro kinakailangan nilang baguhin muna iyong ating list of priorities para sa Sinovac, ang uunahin nila ay unang-una 'no, mayroon kasing 100,000 na donated para sa militar 'no so kinakailangan magamit talaga iyong 100,000 sa militar 'no.

At pangalawa, dahil ang ating first priority ay healthcare workers pagkatapos mga seniors at other seniors at hindi sila pupuwede, baka mauna na iyong mga tinatawag nating mga economic frontliners na kasama po ng ating kasundaluhan. Ito po iyong mga nagtatrabaho sa mga industriya na bukas noong panahon ng ECQ.

So tuluy-tuloy na rin po ang ating bakuna 'no, ang pagbabakuna. Hindi na po maaantala iyan, kung hindi maibibigay sa seniors at healthcare workers, napakadami naman pong mga critical economic frontliners na mabibigyan at siyempre kung maaprubahan na at magkaroon na ng supply agreement na initial 1 million 'no – 50,000 at 950,000 – 1 million Sinovac eh pupuwede na nating ituloy-tuloy at bakunahan na iyong ating mga mahihirap na pinangako ni Presidente na sila po ang mauuna sa bakuna.

Hindi naman po natin pinili ito pero tingnan ninyo mayroon talagang Panginoon na nagsabi mauuna talaga ang mahihirap sa Pilipinas na magkaroon ng bakuna.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. Naku, thank you so much po Secretary Roque. And second question lang po: Ayon nga sa DOH, nadadagdagan pa iyong mga nadi-detect na UK variant sa bansa at sabi naman ng OCTA Research ay tumataas din iyong cases sa Metro Manila. Una po, anong reaksiyon dito ng Malacañang at okay lang po kaya talaga na tayo ay lumipat na sa mas magaan MGCQ despite this update po?

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo po, ang inaprubahan ng inyong IATF ay magbukas ng MGCQ dahil unang-una sapat po iyong ating mga kama para gamutin ang mga magkakasakit. Pangalawa, matutuloy na po ang ating pagbabakuna at mauuna pa nga po sa hanay ang economic frontliners at saka mahihirap kung ito po ay maaprubahan ng NITAG at mamayang hapon po ang meeting ng NITAG. Pangatlo po, dahil po rito at dahil nakita natin na nagpapatupad ang mga Pilipino ng mask, hugas, iwas, kaya po nagkaroon ng rekomendasyon na buksan na natin iyong nobenta'y singko porsiyento (95%) ng ating ekonomiya dahil napakadami po talagang nagugutom na.

Pero kung sasabihin naman ni Presidente nandiyan na naman ang bakuna, hayaan na muna natin magbakuna – wala namang problema iyan 'no because recommendatory lang po ang

IATF at ang katotohanan siyempre po, mas mabuti talagang nandiyan ang bakuna. At dahil aprubado na nga po talaga ang Sinovac, ibig sabihin naririto na po mga Pilipino ang bakuna. So iyong mga kritiko ng gobyerno, pasensiya na po, talaga pong naantala nang ilang araw pero tuloy na po ang bakuna.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. Panghuling tanong na lamang po, Secretary Roque: Sinu-sino po iyong mga makakasama mamaya sa Cabinet meeting at anu-ano po kaya iyong mga mahalagang mapag-uusapan bukod dito pa sa quarantine classification issue?

SEC. ROQUE: It's a full Cabinet meeting po 'no. Dahil nagdesisyon na si Presidente na wala munang face-to-face, wala na po sa agenda iyan. Siguro po kasama sa agenda talaga iyong MGCQ 'no at kasama rin po sa agenda iyong aking pagri-report-an na mga hakbang para mapaingting pa iyong vaccine confidence sang-ayon po sa isang pag-aaral na ating pinagawa po sa isang research group 'no.

So hindi ko po alam kung mapag-uusapan ang usaping baboy pero pagdating po sa usaping baboy, ang inaasahan natin ay mapipirmahan ng Presidente iyong pagtaas po noong tinatawag na MAV [*Minimum Access Volume*] 'no, iyong pag-import nang mas maraming baboy. Pero po mayroon po kasing requirement na kinakailangan Congress must not be in session. So kung mayroon pong maa-agree-han mamaya, it will be whether or not the President should sign the increased MAV, iyong sa volume, tapos ibang issue pa iyong magkano po iyong taripa na mai-impose.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Okay. Thank you so much po, Secretary Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Punta naman tayo kay Usec. Rocky muli!

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Question from Leila Salaverria of Inquirer: How much weight will the President give to the opinion of health experts who warned against easing restriction? Is the President open to deferring the shift to MGCQ especially in Metro Manila given these warnings and what options is he considering?

SEC. ROQUE: Alam ninyo po, when we recommended in IATF MGCQ, that included even the health sector dahil tinitimbang ho natin mabuti. Totoo po puwedeng tumaas ang kaso pero ang katotohanan din, handa naman po tayo. Kaya nga po tayo nag-lockdown noong Marso, mag-iisang taon na, eh para nga ho mapa-improve iyong ating health sector nang sa ganoon magamot natin iyong mga magkakasakit.

Eh nakita ninyo naman po ngayon, 62% po ang available 'no. So bagama't inaasahan nating tataas, hindi naman po lahat iyan ay magiging matinding pagkakasakit eh inaasahan natin na handa pa rin tayo. At iyan iyong ating titimbangin doon sa mga numero ng nagugutom na dahil marami pang sektor ng ekonomiya ang sarado.

Pero gaya ng aking sinabi, hayaan na po natin magdesisyon ang Presidente dahil ultimately, recommendatory lang po ang IATF.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Triciah Terada, please.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Hi. Good afternoon, Spox. Spox, just a press on Sinovac vaccine 'no. The FDA as you mentioned also hindi po niri-recommend sa healthcare workers who are usually exposed to the virus because it's only 50.4% effective to healthcare workers. Ang sunod na question is sir, if this is the efficacy rate, why are we pushing it to regular or the non-healthcare worker population?

SEC. ROQUE: I will quote the experts that we have had as guests here, whether be it Dr. Solante, whether be it Lulu Bravo or Dr. Salvaña: 50% efficacy rate is very much accepted not just in the Philippines, but by the WHO itself. Bakit? Because ang ibig sabihin noon, ang mga nabakunahan only has a 50% chance na magkakasakit sila; at kapag sila ay nagkasakit, it's almost 80% chance na ni hindi nila kinakailangang pumunta sa doktor because it will be mild and asymptomatic and 100% walang maho-hospital.

So we are recommending it because what we want is to avoid deaths and serious illnesses. At dahil ang 50% efficacy rate ay ibig sabihin po, iyan ay mild and asymptomatic lang maski ikaw ay magkasakit. Kaya po natin gagamitin iyan because it's better than no protection and as I said, ang iniwasan natin ay iyong pagkakasakit ng seryoso o 'di naman kaya ay nakamamatay.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: So, sir, if people, for example, won't be seeing na hindi pa po ito puwedeng magamit sa health care workers, do you think it will have an impact on the vaccine confidence? And somehow, as early at this point, we really want to address concerns na parang it gives the impression na low quality iyong bakuna na iyan na mabibigay, bakit daw ibibigay sa mga mahihirap?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi po dahil WHO na po ang nagsabi, 50% ang ating threshold, dahil nga po, dahil that's a 50% change na hindi mo na makukuha ang sakit and 100% chance na hindi ka mamamatay. Bakit naman hindi tatanggapin ang bakuna na magbibigay ng kasiguraduhan na hindi ka mamamatay dahil sa COVID-19? Baka masagasaan ka or iba pa or mamatay ka sa gutom dahil sa lockdown, pero at least hindi ka mamamatay dahil sa COVID-19. Tingin ko naman tatanggapin po iyan ng taumbayan at sigurado po ako kasama po natin ang Malacañang Press Corps sa pagpapahatid ng balita na mas mabuti po talaga na mabigyan tayo ng proteksiyon kaysa wala po tayong proteksiyon.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: So, sir, just to be quite clear on this, our position is, it's not a low-quality vaccine, tama po ba?

SEC. ROQUE: It is not a low-quality vaccine. It is accepted under standards arrived at by WHO itself. It is a guarantee that iyong mga nabakunahan ay hindi po mamamatay dahil sa COVID-19. It is a guarantee na kung ikaw ay tamaan man, mild and asymptomatic lamang.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Sir, dito lang po sa data po natin, we are seeing a slight increase in COVID cases in Metro Manila and then there was a 200% increase, for example, in Pasay alone in three days. How will this factor in, sir, sa recommendation po ng IATF? Will the IATF revise its recommendation to place the whole Philippines or the entire country under MGCQ? And at the same time, sir, mayroon pa po ba tayong nakikitang difference between a GCQ and MGCQ or is it just a matter of terminology na lang po at this point?

SEC. ROQUE: Number one, I cannot also speak on behalf of the IATF in so far as subsequent data are concerned. Siyempre po iyong meeting mamaya is also a meeting of the IATF kasi nga iyong IATF naman, ang composition niya iyong mga members din ng Cabinet. So, I cannot second guess also how the IATF may or may not alter its recommendation given iyong mga nangyayari ngayon. Iyong pangalawang question mo, ano po iyon?

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Iyong MGCQ and GCQ, are there still differences or more on terminology na lang?

SEC. ROQUE: Ang malaking diperensiya po diyan ay dalawang bagay: Public gatherings – hanggang sampu lang po ang GCQ, 50% capacity po ang public gathering sa MGCQ; at ang transportation from 50% to 75%.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Sir, since may Cabinet meeting mamaya, may address po ba si Pangulo?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala po. The Talk to the People will be on Wednesday.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Thank you, Spox. Salamat po.

SEC. ROQUE: Salamat, Trish. Back to Usec. Rocky please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, Secretary, question from Llanesca Panti of GMA News Online: DOH Undersecretary Vergeire said po that vaccine manufacturers are asking for indemnity since COVID-19 vaccines are still under development, emergency use not because of Dengvaxia. Secretary Galvez po and yourself said Dengvaxia was a big factor for seeking indemnity. Which is which po ba daw?

SEC. ROQUE: I stand by the statement of Secretary Galvez because he is the Vaccine Czar, with all due respect to Usec. Vergeire.

USEC. IGNACIO: Question from Roy Mabasa of Manila Bulletin for Ambassador Sorreta: Who is the local supplier of Sputnik vaccine? Has the company complied with government requirements for the vaccine use in the country?

AMB. SORRETA: Thank you very much, Usec. Rocky. There is still no private partner in the Philippines for Sputnik. But I'd like to share na hindi ito hadlang para kung magdesisyon tayo na kumuha ng Sputnik, magiging G-to-G po iyong transaction. They are flexible – they can go with local partners; they can go with government. As far as I know, wala pa hong formal local partners na private sector. I know that there has been some interest from our private sector, which I think is good but the lack of a private sector partner ay hindi ho hadlang iyon para matuloy kung magdesisyon tayo. Salamat Usec. Rocky.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Ambassador.

SEC. ROQUE: Pia Rañada, please.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, quick question lang on Sinovac. Did we have to sign indemnification clauses for Sinovac?

SEC. ROQUE: No.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, also may we know, you said that in three days or maybe four, darating na iyong first batch of Sinovac vaccines. May we know how many thousands of doses this is and what is the distribution plan? How many of these doses will go to Quezon City or Manila? Do we already have that since it's only a few days away?

SEC. ROQUE: 600,000 – these are the donated vaccines by the Chinese government. 100,000 reserved for the Armed Forces. So we will leave it to the AFP how they will proceed with their initial vaccination. But as far as the 500,000 is concerned, we already have the vaccination plan. But as a formality, the NITAG has to meet, and for purposes of Sinovac, they will have to amend their order of priority because obviously it cannot be given to health care workers and it cannot be given to senior citizens. I anticipate, it will be first given to the Armed Forces and to the economic frontliners before we go to the indigents. But we are only talking of 600,000. So, I think we will prioritize the military for the 100,000 and the economic frontliners for the first 600,000 dosage.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, in terms of geographic location because the geography or the place where they will be brought also is part of the prioritization and before, you mentioned that areas which had higher transmissions will get priority for the vaccines arriving. So, do we already know now na like maybe a fifth of this will go to Quezon City because it's the highest in terms of COVID cases. I mean do we have this in terms of the cities it will go to?

SEC. ROQUE: We know that the three areas that will first receive the vaccines will be Metro Manila, Cebu and Davao. So, because the number is 600,000, I think, we already have the list of areas depending on areas with the highest attack rates over a period of time.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: And, sir, the fact that we did not sign indemnification clauses with Sinovac, what does this mean or when we distribute the vaccine and baka magka-side effect iyong Sinovac vaccine? So what then happens to the liability if we did not sign indemnification clauses?

SEC. ROQUE: There is a law being passed by Congress and of course, the law is applicable to all vaccines. There will be an indemnity fund and in case of side effects, there is no obligation on the part of the claimant to prove fault or negligence, they can recover from the P500 million indemnification fund.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Do you wait for this indemnification fund law to be passed before beginning vaccination of Sinovac?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi na po dahil ang hinihintay lang talaga natin ay ang pagdadating ng bakuna. But in any case, this might be a moot and academic question because I read from the news that both chambers of Congress are ready to pass this into law today.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: And, sir, just lastly on the face-to-face classes, you said that the President already rejected this idea. Sir, will there be any more proposals on this? You said it might not be discussed anymore in Cabinet meeting. But for example, allowing at least college students or higher education students to go to face-to-face classes, is this anything, is it something that anyone in the Cabinet would propose given, iyon nga, many Cabinet members have said that we are already, I think, the last country to be still not holding face-to-face classes at least in the region or in certain parts? Is this something that the President would be open to or is he totally shut to the idea of any form of face-to-face classes being held before August?

SEC. ROQUE: I think this is without prejudice to any proposal that the Commission on Higher Education may have. Take note that we have allowed face-t-face classes in medical and allied medical degrees.

Number two, it is also without prejudice 'no to the Secretary of Education submitting all relevant information that they gathered preparatory to their move to reopen discussion on the holding of pilot face-to-face classes.

I understand that the Department of Education has conducted a survey involving at least a million respondents and the overwhelming sentiment is that the learners themselves want to resume with face-to-face classes. And I think this is without prejudice to the Secretary of Education presenting this study to the President.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, iyong all these dates that you mentioned, iyong potential first pilot test, is this something that the President himself said he would be open to?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, it's something that the President personally relayed to me and I guess what he is anticipating is that since we will begin vaccination this month, we would be way ahead of our vaccination program in August to give us the confidence to resume at least limited face-to-face education.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Sir, could I just ask a question Ambassador Sorreta?

SEC. ROQUE: Go ahead, please. Your last question please.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Ambassador, do we have a commitment or any expression of interest from the Russian Government to provide the donation of Sputnik V just like China donated hundreds of thousands of vaccines of doses of Sinovac? Is there something like that on the way?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: We have no discussions on donations but what they have done is they're giving free vaccines here in Russia to Filipinos or foreigners because their policy is to vaccinate everyone to make everyone safe. So, in that sense, there's a donation and many... number of Filipinos have already availed of the sputnik vaccine here and as far as I know there's been no side effects—I mean, no serious side effects, just headaches and pain at the area of vaccination.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: So, sir, any—Sputnik V doses that the Philippine Government will get for domestic use here in the Philippine will be paid for by the Philippine Government, is that correct?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: That is our understanding. Although it's a G2G (Government to Government), it's commercial agreement. I have no instructions to ask for donations because we are willing to pay for – I understand – for the vaccines we need.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: And once an EUA is issued by the FDA here, do we know how quickly Russia can bring the vaccines here if we agree to pay them?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: The turnaround time has been—it will not come all at the same time, just once the orders are made it has to be produced, like I said it is not off the shelf. Production time has ranged from a few days to a few weeks depending on the number of vaccines and the delivery—amounts to be delivered, how much we need immediately and then long term. These are details that do affect production and delivery time. Hard to speculate, because the information will have to come from us and how much we need that this time immediately and the long term.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: All right. Thank you, Ambassador! Thank you, Spox!

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Thank you very much.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you very much, Pia. Let's go back to Usec. Rocky, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Secretary, iyong tanong ni Leila Salaverria ng Inquirer, nasagot ninyo na po about Sinovac.

May follow-up naman po si Rosalie Coz ng UNTV: Nabanggit po sa mga nakalipas na pagkakataon na malaki ang maitutulong ng mga health care workers sa vaccine confidence. Paano po natin mapapaigting ang vaccine confidence kung hindi po recommended ang Sinovac vaccines sa health care workers? Kabilang po ba si Pangulong Duterte sa mga unang mababakunahan pagdating ng Sinovac vaccines?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, obviously po dahil sinabi po ng inisyu ng FDA na hindi muna natin gagamitin sa senior, hindi po mapapasama ang Presidente sa mauuna. Pero ang mga doktor naman po, lahat po ng nakakausap kong doktor na matino – mayroon naman po talagang sablay 'no – pero iyong mga matitino naman po eh sinasabi basta aprubado ng EUA magpapaturok din sila.

So, iyan naman po talaga ang ating sinasabi, dahil dumaan po iyan sa masusing pag-aaral. Nakita ninyo po, hindi minadali at hindi natin napilit na gumawa ng desisyon ang mga eksperto na ayaw nila. So tumagal po ang proseso, naantala ang pagdating ng Sinovac so wala po talagang nagpabilis sa proseso at nagkaroon po ng kondisyones.

So, iyan po ay basehan para tayo'y magkaroon ng kumpiyansa na talagang ang mga eksperto ay tiningnan ang datos at ang sabi nila puwedeng gamitin para sa lahat except ang matatanda at sa mga health care workers dahil nga po exposed talaga sila sa COVID-19.

USEC. IGNACIO: Question from Sam Medenilla ng Business Mirror: May naging aksyon na po ba si President Duterte regarding sa MAV para po sa pork?

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Gaya ng aking sinabi kanina, bagamat naghihintay ng pirma iyan ng ating Presidente eh kinakailangan naman po pirmahan iyan kapag hindi po naka-session ang Kongreso. So, tingnan po natin kung anong mangyayari, kasi habang nasa session ang Kongreso ang mga bagay=bagay tungkol sa taripa dapat ang umakto ay ang Kongreso pero tingnan po natin nga ang mga pangyayari sa susunod na araw dahil emergency din po ang nangyari pagdating sa supply ng baboy dahil nga po naman sa ASF. Sabi ko nga eh talagang nakalulungkot, mayroon ng COVID-19, mayroon pang ASF.

Joseph Morong, please. Joseph?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Hi sir!

SEC. ROQUE: Yes. Go ahead please.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Yes, sir. Good afternoon!

SEC. ROQUE: Go ahead.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Sir, can you hear me?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, I can hear you.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Okay. Sir, good afternoon! Good afternoon, Ambassador Sorreta. Sir, my question is for you. Okay, schedule. So, February, sir, Sinovac iyong gagamitin natin sa first vaccination in the [technical difficulties]—

SEC. ROQUE: Nawawala ka, but yes, I can confirm that it looks like Sinovac will be the first vaccine that we will use in our vaccination program.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Okay. Babatiin ko lang po iyong ating internet service provider that is Sky and it's choppy. So, sir, next question. What happens now to Pfizer and AstraZeneca? I heard that there is already a notice from the WHO as far as the delivery is concerned. Are you aware of it?

SEC. ROQUE: I said that 'no, that as far as AstraZeneca is concerned, they have sent a notice and it's not just to the Philippines but to all recipients that AstraZeneca will be shipped out at the end of February but warned that there may be delays because of logistical challenges.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: So, Astra – March. How about Pfizer?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa pong kasiguraduhan ang Pfizer. But we're only talking of 115,000 doses anyway from Pfizer 'no. So hindi naman po talaga malaking issue iyan. Ang malaking inaasahan natin iyong AstraZeneca at saka iyong Sinovac that will begin delivery of at least one million dosages for the next few months, tapos madudoble pa iyan to two million, kung hindi ako magkakamali, nang pang-apat na buwan yata; iyong second quarter yata magiging two million.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Sir, okay. Iyon po bang Chinese Government have we already informed them of the decision of the FDA? I'm sure you have.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, we have.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Ah, okay. And anong sabi po nila? Kailan iyong schedule ng dating? How soonest?

SEC. ROQUE: They could not commit a date but it will take around three days from date of approval for them to ensure that the vaccines arrive in the Philippines.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Barring any unforeseen circumstances again, within the week it will arrive?

SEC. ROQUE: We're praying it will arrive within the week but I think the three days that they asked from date of issuance falls within the week.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Okay. Sir, a little bit lang, sir, on MGCQ? Did you say you talked to the President this morning?

SEC. ROQUE: Last night.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Last night. And I think he has an inclination already as to when we are going to implement the MGCQ? I heard that – I do not know if you can confirm – that he wants the MGCQ only if we've rolled out the vaccine?

SEC. ROQUE: Medyo I'm a bit uncertain whether or not I can confirm that. I was pursuing the issue last night pero ang naririnig ko lang sa linya – medyo malabo rin iyong linya 'no – was "steady muna tayo, steady muna tayo." But I'm not sure if he was referring to face-to-face or MGCQ because I was asking, "Paano po iyong MGCQ? Paano iyong MGCQ?" Pero I wasn't sure kung nagkakaintindihan kami na my question was about MGCQ when he said "steady muna tayo."

So, I'm not certain 'no. But I think everyone in the IATF which is the Cabinet members of course would want to see also the data analytics from the experts first before we proceed with the next quarantine classification.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA 7: Sir, if data iyan medyo delikado kasi ang sabi ng OCTA as far as Metro Manila is concerned, we had a 45% increase in new cases in Metro Manila. It doesn't inspire a relaxation of the GGCQ?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm not sure if forty-five percent, I have not seen that, you know. And I'm sure the Department of Health that has the data would be in a better position to advise the members of the Cabinet and the President later.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, just last two mini questions. Should we wait for the vaccine rollout before we relax, do you think that would be more prudent?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, the President said that as far as face-to-face is concerned, he wants to wait for the vaccine rollout. Hindi naman niya sinabi na matapos na lahat mabakunahan 'no. Kasi talaga naman kapag nabakunahan mo na ang Metro Manila, Cebu, Davao eh halos 80% wala

ka nang problema eh dahil konti lang naman talaga ang problema natin sa iba't ibang parte ng Pilipinas 'no.

So, tingin ko hindi naman matagal na masimulan iyong proseso ng pagbabakuna sa Metro Manila, Cebu and Davao. But I cannot second guess the President, Joseph, baka mamaya pagalitan ako dahil hindi nga malinaw sa pag-uusap namin kahapon kung iyong sagot niya na steady muna tayo referred to face-to-face or the MGCQ. Kasi tinatanong ko, nagka-clarification pero nawala na po iyong linya.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Okay. Sir, na-revise na ba, if you're going to revise – obviously you're going to revise if you're using Sinovac – may listahan ba kayo, sir, ano ba ang isusunod ninyo? Well, military madali iyan, but the frontline workers, the essential workers, did the local governments send the list already such that we can begin as early as maybe next week?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pong problema iyan kasi ito po iyong mga empleyado doon sa mga industriyang hindi natin pinasara at siyempre iyong mga transport workers ay kasama na rin po diyan. So we're talking of farmers; we're talking of miners; we're talking of fishermen; we're talking of transport workers, so sila po iyong mga economic frontliners na tinatawag natin. We're talking of export-oriented industries; we're talking of ... ano pa ba? BPOs, iyon po.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Who holds the list? Sino ang may hawak ng listahan?

SEC. ROQUE: Mayroon na po tayong mga listahan. Matagal na pong nakalap natin iyan because handa na nga po tayong maglunsad ng ating bakuna.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, last na lang. If we're going to shift sa MGCQ next month, ano ba ito, sir, patibayan na lang, matira matibay?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman tama iyon 'no. Kasi unang-una, eh sinisigurado naman natin na mataas iyong kakayahan natin na magbigay ng medical attention sa mga magkakasakit – 62% ng ating ICU beds are available at—ano nga ba iyon? Bukod diyan, 68% ang ating isolation beds available, 77% ang ating ward beds available, at 79% ventilators.

At uulitin ko, kaya naman tayo nagsarado ng ekonomiya not for the heck of it; it was to prepare our health sector to attend doon sa mga magkakasakit ng seryoso dahil karamihan naman talaga ay asymptomatic at mild. Okay?

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: All right, sir. Thank you for your time.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Joseph. Punta uli kay Usec. Rocky.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, Secretary. Question from Ace Romero ng Philippine Star. Clarification daw po, iyong possible face-to-face in August, is it only for primary and secondary levels o kasali po ang college at post-graduate levels?

SEC. ROQUE: Gaya ng sinabi ko, that's without prejudice kung mayroon pang proposal ang CHED. Kasi ang pinagbawal naman ng Presidente ay iyong sakop ng Department of Education – elementary at high school.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Tanong pa rin ni Ace Romero regarding doon sa announcement that you are ready for a more relaxed quarantine status or MGCQ, does it apply to Metro Manila or the entire country?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, iyong rekomendasyon po ng inyong IATF was for the whole Philippines, inclusive of Metro Manila. In fact, marami ngang nagsasabi na effectively, Metro Manila is under MGCQ already 'no. But as I said, ilang oras na lang naman po, mapag-uusapan na iyan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Tanong naman ni Leila Salaverria: Since hindi puwede si President Duterte sa Sinovac, ibig sabihin ba nito ay Sinopharm ang ibibigay sa kaniya kasi gusto niya Chinese vaccine?

SEC. ROQUE: He has said na his preference is for Sinopharm.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Question from Trish Terada ng CNN Philippines: Paano po iyong storage ng Sinovac, ready na po ba?

SEC. ROQUE: Ay, wala pong problema diyan. Ordinary refrigeration lang po iyan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Question from Genalyn Kabling ng Manila Bulletin: Did the government bungled the vaccine procurement process? Senator Frank Drilon said, the delay in vaccine delivery was due to mismanagement, not indemnity requirements by vaccine supplier. Your reaction, please?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we obviously disagree and malinaw po iyan 'no. Mayroon tayong liham, hindi po madi-deny ang liham na galing sa COVAX na mid-February darating iyong Pfizer at saka iyong AstraZeneca. Kaya nga lang po, may mga natakot na manufacturers dahil dito lang naman sa Pilipinas nadidemanda ang mga bakuna na inaprubahan hindi lang ng FDA, kung hindi ng WHO 'no. At siyempre, kinakailangang protektahan nila iyong kanilang mga interes baka mamaya makulong sila eh sila na nga ang gumagawa ng bakuna para sa COVID-19.

So anyway, they are entitled to say what they want. Pero kagaya ng aking sinabi, sandali lang po ang kaligayahan ng ating mga kritiko dahil tuloy na po ang ating vaccination program. Enjoy it while it lasts for a very short while.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, thank you po. Melo Acuña, please.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Magandang hapon po, Secretary Harry. Good afternoon. Para po sana kay Ambassador Carlos Sorreta mula sa Russia.

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Hello, Sir Melo. Magandang tanghali po.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Magandang tanghali po. Nice to see you virtually. Nakita po ba ninyo iyong Phase 3 results doon sa Sputnik vaccine? Ito po kaya ay epektibo para sa mga Pilipino?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Thank you very much, Melo. My understanding is it is will be effective. The Phase 1, 2 and 3 results have been published in its entirety in an open source and it's available to anyone who wants to examine it. We have received assurances that it will be effective on Filipinos. They are now using Sputnik vaccine in almost all continents, and the reports have been quite positive in terms of side effects and effectivity.

So, so far, I think FDA will decide 'no, but from the information we have, it should be applicable to those of us in our country.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Opo. Nabalitaan na po ba ninyo kung may mga kababayan tayo sa Russia na nabakunahan at kumusta naman sila?

AMBASSADOR SORRETA: Mayroon po, madami na po dahil inalok nang libre ang vaccine kahit sa mga foreigners dito. Mayroon na hong mga Pilipino na nag-avail. It's also available commercially; kung pupunta po sa private doctor, puwede rin ho. May mga nag-avail ng vaccine nang ganoon. Pero madami na ho, kasi iyong vaccine available sa malls eh. Aside from medical centers in our areas, they set up vaccination facilities in the malls. Eh madalas ang Pilipino sa mga malls, siguro pagkatapos ng shopping o food court, dadaan sa vaccination center.

I've met some of them. They're quite happy about it. In fact, they've been boasting it on Facebook. So they're quite happy. I have not heard of any serious side effects.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: I see. Thank you very much for the update. Keep safe.

Para po kay Secretary Harry Roque naman ang aking tanong. Kung sa Russia po ay nagbibigay ng libreng bakuna sa mga banyaga, mayroon po kaya tayong ganoon ding reciprocal consideration for foreigners in the Philippines?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa po tayong ganiyang polisiya pero inaasahan ko po na bubuo rin po ng ganiyang polisiya ang IATF kasi nga po iyong anyo ng COVID ay wala namang kinikilala iyan na nasyonalidad o kasarian o kulay 'no. Pare-pareho po basta tao ay hinahawa niya 'no.

So importante rin po na magkaroon talaga ng polisiya na lahat ng tao sa Pilipinas ay mabigyan po ng bakuna.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Opo. Secretary Harry, natanggap ko po iyong isang statement ni Bishop Gerry Alminaza mula po naman sa Church-People-Worker Solidarity. Ito po ay tungkol kay Ginoong Otto Rudolf De Vries, pero para bukas na siguro ito. Pakisuyo lang pong malaman kung ano ang naging dahilan at kinansela iyong kaniyang permanent residency sa Pilipinas at kung bakit siya pinababalik na sa kaniyang bansang pinagmulan.

SEC. ROQUE: Salamat at nilabas mo iyan ngayon kasi wala akong idea kung ano iyan. But we'll find out for tomorrow. Okay?

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Thank you.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Melo.

Okay, wala na po tayong katanungan ngayon. Pero ngayon po ay kasama natin ang ating isang bisita, wala pong iba kung hindi ang aking matalik na kaibigan, ang Vice Mayor po ng Batangas City, Vice Mayor Berberabe. Welcome, Dr. Berberabe, at talaga naman sa panahon ng pandemya, importante na iyong ilan sa ating mga namumuno ay doktor din – at isa po diyan si Dr. Berberabe. Ano po iyan ha, mayaman na po iyan sa Amerika, ginive up iyong kaniyang napakayamang practice sa Amerika para bumalik at magbigay serbisyo sa ating mga Batangueño.

So dahil wala na po tayong mga tanong, maraming salamat, classmate – Ambassador Carlos Sorreta. Thank you for your time. And sana we can have you again soon.

Maraming salamat, Usec. Rocky. Maraming salamat po sa ating mga kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps.

At dahil wala na nga pong tanong, mga kababayan, sa ngalan po ng ating Presidente Rodrigo Roa Duterte, ito po ang inyong Spox Harry Roque na nagsasabi: Nariyan na po ang bakuna pero ingat po muna tayo. Samantala, mask, hugas at iwas.

Magandang hapon, Pilipinas.

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