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

Gaya nang nauna kong sinabi, si Presidente Duterte ang pangunahing arkitekto ng ating polisiyang panlabas. Careful, calculated at calibrated ang foreign policy ng ating Pangulo pagdating sa West Philippine Sea. Totoo na ang Pilipinas ay may territorial at maritime claims at entitlement sa West Philippine Sea kasama na po ang mga isla na ating inaangkin. Ngunit totoo rin na ang ating claims at entitlement ay pinagtatalunan or disputed ng ibang mga bansa. Dahil dito, ayon sa International Law, we have to promote our claims and entitlements, and we manage or resolve disputes through peaceful and legal means kasama na po diyan iyong paghahain ng mga diplomatic protests; lahat ng mga ito ay nagsisimula at nagtatapos sa negosasyon. Kaugnay nito, hindi tinatalikuran ni Presidente ang ating claims at entitlements. Ang totoo, ang Pangulo at ang kaniyang administrasyon ay paulit-ulit nang sinasabi ito sa bilateral talks kasama ang Tsina at sa multilateral fora katulad po ng UN General Assembly.

Hindi nakakatulong ang mga outbursts po ng dating Supreme Court Justice Carpio at dating DFA Secretary Del Rosario, maging ang kanilang demand na hardline all or nothing policies na ang resulta, gaya ng turo ng kasaysayan, ay walang mararating o kung kaya ay mag-udyok ng giyera – ito mismo ang iniiwasan po ng ating Pangulo. Dapat alam ito ng dalawang opisyal lalo na ni dating Supreme Court Justice Carpio na isang abogado at si dating DFA Secretary na naging top diplomat natin. Itigil na nila ang kanilang panlilinlang sa taumbayan sa kanilang mga ilegal, impractical at irresponsableng pananalita – hindi sila nakakatulong. Hayaan na nila si Presidente na may foresight, information at mandato ayon sa ating Saligang Batas na gumawa ng sound foreign policy decisions.

Sa usaping bakuna naman po tayo. Dumating noong Sabado, a-uno ng Mayo, ang 15,000 dosages na Sputnik V sa Pilipinas. Ang Gamaleya or Sputnik V ang pangalawang government procured vaccine na dumating sa bansa. Ang ibig sabihin nito ay mayroon na tayong brands sa ating vaccine supply inventory. Magiging pilot run itong unang batch ng 15,000 doses para sa paghahanda natin sa pagdating ng 485,000 doses ngayong buwan ng Mayo. Kailangan natin ito para ma-assess ang logistics capability natin lalo na highly sensitive vaccine ang Sputnik V na kinakailangang ma-store sa negative 18 degrees.

Mamaya ay makakasama po natin si Dra. Nina Gloriani, DOST-Vaccine Expert Panel head para sa iba pang mga detalye.

COVID-19 updates naman po tayo: Nasa 8,346 na po ang mga bagong kaso ng COVID-19 sa bansa ayon sa DOH May 2 case bulletin. Patuloy ang pagtaas ng mga gumagaling: Nasa

966,080 na po ang bilang ng naka-recover; samantalang nasa 17,431 ang binawian ng buhay. Nananatiling mababa po ang ating case fatality rate na nasa 1.65% -- ang world average po ay 2.1%.

Patuloy ang pagbaba ng aktibong kaso ng coronavirus base sa datos ng DOH ng COVID cases sa buong bansa. Ito ay kukumparahin ang mga bagong kaso noong April 25 - May 1, kumpara noong April 18 to 24. So tignan po natin ito, kung titignan ninyo po ay talaga naman pong ang average numbers noong April 18 to 24 ay 9,068.42; at ngayon po ang average case ay 8,205.7.

Unahin natin po ang NCR, sapat na ba ho or kulang na ba ho ang ating mga kama sa ating mga ospital? Unahin po natin ang NCR: Ang ICU beds po natin ay 70% utilized; ang isolation beds natin ay 50% utilized lamang; ang ating ward beds ay 62% utilized; ang ventilators na utilized ay 54% lamang.

Sa buong Pilipinas, 64% po ang ICU beds na utilized; ang isolation beds ay 45% utilized; ang ating ward beds ay 51% utilized; ang ating ventilators ay 43% utilized.

Sa iba pang mga bagay, ngayong araw, a-tres ng Mayo, ating ginugunita ang “World Press Freedom Day”. Sabi ng Pangulo, ang selebrasyon ngayong taon, and I quote, “Affirms the Philippines’ commitment to protect press freedom as a public good and as an indispensable requirement of a vibrant democracy.”

Samantala, mariing kinukondena ng Pangulo ang pagpatay kay Mr. Mariano Antonio Cui III, consultant for hospital operations ng Negros Oriental at dating chief of staff ni Congressman Jules Ledesma. Inatasan ni Presidente ang NBI na imbestigahan ang pagpatay na ito at parusahan ang may sala at bigyan ng katarungan ang pamilya ng biktima. Nakikiramay po ang Presidente sa pamilya at sa mga taga-Negros dahil alam po namin na mahal po itong si Mr. Cui sa buong probinsiya ng Negros.

Dito po nagtatapos ang ating presentasyon. Makakasama natin ngayon po ang ating Philippine Ambassador to India, Ramon Bagatsing; ating Treatment Czar, Usec. Leopoldo Vega; at Dra. Nina Gloriani, DOST Vaccine Expert Panel Head.

Unahin ko na po si Ambassador Bagatsing. Ambassador, good morning to you in India, if it’s morning in India. Pero tatlo po ang aking katanungan: Unang-una po, inaasahan po ng taumbayan ang 40 million na Novavax. Dahil po sa mga pangyayari sa India, dapat bang asahan pa ang 40 million po na Novavax o ito ba ho ay apektado doon sa deklarasyon ng mga opisyal sa India na nagbabawal panandalian ang export ng mga bakuna?

Pangalawa po, kailan po tingin ninyo magkakaroon ng repatriation dito sa Pilipinas ng mga Pilipino dahil iyong travel ban po natin ay sakop ang mga Pilipino? Kinakailangan pong magkaroon ng ugnayan sa panig ng IATF at ng embahada kung magkakaroon po ng repatriation flight?

At pangatlo, marami pong nagtatanong: Paano ba ho tayo puwedeng tumulong sa India? Dahil ang nangyari naman sa India ay puwedeng mangyari kahit kaninong bansa. The floor is yours, Ambassador Ramon “Dondon” Bagatsing.

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: Magandang tanghali sa inyong diyan, Secretary Roque at sa ating mga kababayan. Salamat sa pagkakataon na ito na ibinigay mo sa akin para magpaliwanag ng ilang mga bagay na inyong natukoy.

Unang-una, tungkol sa vaccines po: Under negotiation—dalawang vaccines po ang pinag-uusapan dito. Ang una iyong COVAXIN na nagkaroon na ng EUA from the FDA, and hopefully matapos na iyong ibang mga regulatory requirements. We hope that these requirements can be expedited by the regulatory authorities in the Philippines so that it can be brought there. So eight million po iyong COVAXIN, and once the all the approvals are in place, they can send it there within one month.

Iyong 30 million ng Novavax, this is a tie-up with Serum Institute of India which is the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world, and Novavax which is an American company. Ang brand name ng vaccine na iyan ay Covavax. Secretary Galvez was here last month and he was able to successfully negotiate the supply agreement between the government of the Philippines and the Serum Institute, this 30 million and the scheduled delivery there is the 3rd of 4th quarter of this year.

Now, you mentioned about the ban on exports of vaccines ‘no. The Indian government does not allow any ban on the export of vaccines but we still have to get approval from them in order for us to send it to the Philippines. So upon discussions with these importers, basta maliwanag ang approvals diyan sa bansa natin, they can bring it there at the soonest possible time, at sana makatulong naman iyan.

And iyong COVAXIN po is a tripartite agreement. In other words, some LGUs ordered; some corporations ordered thru Go Negosyo; and the third party would be the supplier. So once that is settled, it will be there.

The 30 million of Covavax is between the government and Serum Institute. So it’s up to our government to determine how this will be distributed.

Now, we are aware that there are three phases of distribution ‘no – essential services, and secondly iyong mga age group, and thirdly iyong mga bata; the same experience is being done here in India. So hindi po naman sila nagkukulang, their vaccination drive is ongoing and now they are into Phase 3 – iyong mga 18 years old pataas.

On the repatriation, we are very much aware of the difficulties. It is logistically difficult for us to send our kababayans home because of the travel ban not only in our country but in other countries as well. So, even without us issuing the travel ban, there is a de facto travel ban because if you take a commercial flight, the areas that the countries that you will have to

transit do not allow Indian passengers. So, de facto we cannot send them home. So, we will wait for clearances and hopefully once these clearances are secured and the ban is lifted in these countries and in our country, we can send some of our kababayans here.

Hindi pa naman ganoon karami 'no, I mean if we compare to what happened to Italy and the Middle East last year, hundreds iyan. Dito hindi pa aabot ng isandaan. Right now, it's about 50 only. But each number counts, each person counts. If they want to go home, we will do everything to do so and we have the assurance of Secretary Locsin, that at the appropriate time we can send our kababayans home.

And then thirdly, how can the Philippines help? I think President Duterte has already sent a letter of solidarity and support to the Prime Minister here. Other countries, there at least 40 countries that have donated oxygen equipment and other ventilators and other medical equipments to India. Ang pinakamalakas sigurong puwedeng ibigay natin sa kanila ay ang ating dasal, ang ating pakikiisa, ang ating solidarity, pakikipagkapwa, service to humanity, that's the best, I think, that we can do under the circumstances right now.

Because the whole world is aware also that we have our challenges back in Manila. Maganda iyong report na ginawa ninyo in so far as hospital beds are concerned because right here it is extremely difficult to get a hospital bed and extremely difficult to get the oxygen needed by the patients. So, we are fortunate in that sense that we do not and I hope we will never reach that saturation point where we will not have all the health-care services required of our kababayans who get stricken with COVID. Because right now here, we have nineteen and a half million Indians who are affected; 215,000 deaths. But on the other side of the coin, you have 155 million Indians that have been vaccinated.

So, I hope I have answered those three points that you have raised, Secretary Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Ambassador. So, uulitin ko lang po, wala kayong impormasyon na maaantala iyong pagdating sa Pilipinas sa third and fourth quarter ng mga bakuna na manggagaling sa India?

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: As far as the Indian side is concerned, Covaxin Bharat Biotech, they have given their firm commitment that once all the papers are expedited on the Philippines' end, then they can deliver that eight million.

Ang Serum Institute naman, September pa ang kanilang planned rollout, so, last part or the third quarter and the fourth quarter. So, again, iyong mga regulatory requirements coming from the US, WHO, etc., once that is secured wala namang issue and I don't think that the Indian Government will give us a hard time getting authority or approval for the export to the Philippines.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Ambassador Bagatsing.

Kasama po natin ang ating Treatment Czar Usec. Leopoldo Vega. Sir, nakita po natin sa datos na 70% pa rin ang ating ICU beds pero napansin ko po dito na sa ICU beds, ang nakasulat pa rin ay 700 total beds pa lamang tayo. 700 total beds pa lang 'no pero kinakailangan siguro i-update natin ito para bumaba iyong percentage utilization dahil ang alam ko po iyong 179 na nai-commit ng private at public hospital as a result of the PhilHealth payment at saka iyong 120 na additional ICU beds na naging operational only last April 23 sa Tala po 'no.

So, hindi pa kasama sa 700 na ginagamit natin as basis for the computation for 70% utilized, at kapag naisama po iyan eh bababa talaga iyong ating utilization pati na ICU beds and looking at our utilization of ICU beds, ward beds and ventilators, mukhang we are approaching the moderate – moderate pa lang dahil 60% po ang moderate.

So, magkano na ba ho talaga, ilan na ba ho talaga iyong ating ICU beds ngayon dahil ang nakasulat po sa datos ng DOH hanggang ngayon is 700 total beds lang po? The floor is yours, Usec. Vega. [Nakamute, Usec. Vega. Naka-mute]

DOH USEC. VEGA: Good afternoon, Spox Harry and most especially to Ambassador Bagatsing in India right now and to all the listeners and viewers.

First, allow me to mention that for the last two months talagang hinahabol natin ang bed allocation for the COVID patients that we have here in NCR, Region III, and Region IV-A. So far, our strategy really was to open up the field modular hospitals na ginawa ho natin last November. And the second is make sure that the hospitals will have to increase their allocations of beds lalung-lalo na sa intensive care units because this will directly impact with our case fatality rate.

So, for the last two months ho, we have been meeting with the different chief of hospitals and I'm pleased to report, although this has to be encoded in the data tracker that we have, we already have added 1,148 total. Before, sa March, we only had 781 na ICU beds, now we have a total of 1,148 or a difference of 367. So, malaking kaluwagan po ito and that's the reason why bumaba na rin nang kaunti ang ating intensive care units compared with last month na umaabot talaga sa high-risk category. Ito iyong mga naabot between 78 and 80%. Now it's hovering between 70-71%, kasi din intindihin naman natin na ang intensive care patients do have a longer turnaround time.

Sa isolation beds naman natin, we also increased the hospital beds kasi alam natin na there are also moderate cases na they are increasing because of the increase number of positive cases. At saka mayroon ding step-down ang serious patients to moderate bed to an isolation bed to consider them as moderate. So, nakapagdagdag po tayo ng 544 beds compared with last month.

So, itong ginagawa po natin is making sure na iyong intensive care unit natin hindi aabot sa critical risk position wherein it would be very hard for the health-care workers and even the patients to access and get specialized care.

So, at the moment, Spox Harry, I think we are still continuing the number of beds to be allocated for the intensive care. So far since last month, we were able to ramp up 367 of these intensive care unit beds in the different hospitals and aside from the field modular and secondly, we also ramp up the isolation beds.

So, we are still continuing though nang ating pagplano na kailangan talaga madagdagan ang ating health capacity. So this is the reason why nagpa-construct na rin iyong 110 modular field hospital sa Lung Center and another 220 sa National Mental Hospital. These are potential, specialized units or intensive care.

Bukas ho ay bubuksan na rin natin ang modular hemodialysis ng National Kidney. Ito kasi iyong problema noon, hindi malaman kung saan dadalhin iyong mga kidney patients natin na nagdialyze since nagko-close iyong mga pre-standing dialysis at saka nagka-clog na sa NKTi at saka sa Jose Rodriguez Memorial Hospital.

So, this is the reason na bubuksan din natin tomorrow iyong modular hemodialysis especially for COVID sa NKTi, capable of handling mga 25 beds. Pero kung three shifts siya, aabot ng mga 60 patients per day. So, ito iyong malaking increase sa number of allocated beds natin and very specific for COVID-19.

Back to you, Sec. Harry.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Usec. Vega. Usec., kailan po kaya maa-adjust iyong mga datos ng DOH to reflect the additional beds kasi po sa mga panahon ngayon eh may mga kritikong nagsasabi na we're even worse off than India daw 'no? So, kinakailangan maipakita natin iyong tamang utilization rate lalung-lalo na ng mga ICU beds natin. So, itong figure po ng DOH kailan kaya nila papalitan? Hanggang sa ngayon po 700 pa lang ang ICU beds natin sa Metro Manila at 1,900 lang all over the Philippines? Dapat ho palitan na iyan kasi sa aking initial computation kung madadagdagan na, kung magiging 1,000 ang total bed sa Metro Manila, ang percent utilization natin ay bababa to – hindi ho na-compute – pero I'm sure it will go down to around 60% or even less 'no. So, kailan po kaya iaamyenda ng DOH itong mga total beds available for purposes of computing utilization rate?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Actually, ginagawa na iyan, Secretary. In fact, last week nag-usap po kami ng mga hospital chiefs. Kasi ito hong pagbago ho nito kailangan po nilang i-manage sa kanilang data bed tracker na nasa kanila. So, we have informed iyong mga data managers po nila, iyong lahat ng mga hospitals diyan sa NCR to be consistent in the number of beds and the number of severe cases that they have. So, ultimately ho ang maipalabas namin na out of, since last month na mayroon tayong 781, we have already expanded the allocated beds for ICU to 1,148 or an increase of 367 beds po, Sec. Harry.

SEC. ROQUE: So sana po ma-reflect na ito sa official na datos baka mamaya nasa 50% utilization rate na lang po tayong na ICU beds 'no.

One last point po, noong ako po mismo ay naging biktima ng COVID ay siyempre po maraming nagsasalita na hindi raw makapasok ang mga pasyente sa ospital. Pero ang katotohanan kung titingnan po natin ang datos, sapat naman po ang mga kama natin 'no pati sa ICU beds. At ang sinasabi po namin palagi dito sa ating press briefing, dapat tumawag doon sa One Hospital Command Center.

So ito po, nag-dial kami sa 1555 [phone operator]... so ibig sabihin naku-contact naman po iyong 1555 na hotline po natin 'no. So ang tanong ko lang po is, noong mga panahon po right after my COVID, nagdagdag po ng singkuwentang call centers ang MMDA at plano pong magdagdag din ng singkuwenta ang DOH 'no. Nakapagdagdag na ba ho tayo ng 100 na call operators para sa ating hotline for the One COVID hotline?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Spox Harry, thank you ano. Pero alam mo itong One COVID Referral Center natin o One Hospital Command, kailangan talaga ay ma-update iyong human resource at saka pangalawa iyong technology. So sa human resource naman, naka-handle kami ng interviews, siguro mga 85 nakapasa ho sa interview for possible deployment na po iyan for the receiving or call agents for the One Hospital Command.

Pangalawa po, nag-i-improve na rin iyong aming upgrade sa aming telecommunication kasi naka-hookup na kami sa DICT at saka sa PLDT po binigyan din kami ng manage services through subscription na mag-u-open nang more lines. So iyong 1555 po, iyan ang initial namin pero 'pag once na ma-connect na talaga iyong aming bagong hotline number na direct na sa One Hospital Command ay magiging 1554 na iyan. Pero we will announce it later because it still needs the connection.

Pero as of the moment, we're trying to improve our function, our service po to make sure that we will be able to, you know, connect the patients with us and to the coordinated and referral to Oplan Kalinga or to the different hospitals. Ngayon pong month na 'to, we have already made an agreement with PICC na lilipat ho kami doon because the MMDA Complex is becoming small for the number of workers and the number of new gadgets that we have for the command.

So siguro po mga middle of May, we will transfer and we will be able to provide you a better service and a better functionality. Kasi we hope na this will not just be for COVID but even in post-COVID, we will have a national referral system all over the Philippines, connecting the different hospitals, LGU for access and even for financial services that are needed by the patient.

SEC. ROQUE: Well congratulations Usec. dahil sa totoo lang po, sinusundan po talaga namin iyong capability na ma-contact ang One Hospital Command Center at kanina po pinarinig naman namin na sumasagot po ang 1555. Hindi gaya ng siguro mga one month or two months ago na busy ang lahat. So congratulations Usec. Vega. At again ang reminder po natin sa ating mga kababayan, kung nais ninyo pong malaman kung saan kayo pupunta, tumawag lang po

kayo sa mga numero ng One Hospital Command Center dahil kung hindi po, talagang mangyayari sa inyo na baka ang mapuntahan ninyo ay puno na po iyong COVID bed allocation nila. So tawag lang po sa One Hospital Command Center.

Kasama rin po natin—maraming salamat, Usec. Vega—ngayon si Dr. Gloriani. Siya po ay isang miyembro ng DOST Vaccine Expert Panel, Dr. Nina Gloriani. Ma'am ang tanong ko po, dumating na iyong ating 15,000 trial order para sa Gamaleya Sputnik V pero pagdating na pagdating ay may balita na tila hindi po inaprubahan ng Brazil na nasa top 5 in terms of COVID cases itong Sputnik V. So, paano po natin mai-explain iyong desisyon ng ating expert panel group na payagan at iyong desisyon ninyo na ligtas at epektibo ang Sputnik V. The floor is yours, Dr. Gloriani.

DR. GLORIANI: Magandang hapon Secretary Roque at kay Ambassador at kay Usec. Vega at sa lahat po.

Ang Gamaleya COVID vaccine na Sputnik V po ay in-evaluate ng Vaccine Expert Panel very thoroughly for safety, immunogenicity and efficacy. In fact nakapag-release na po kami noong information about that sa DOH bago po—noong pinag-uusapan nila ang pag-rollout nga nitong unang 15,000 to 20,000 doses.

So malinaw po, actually marami po kaming hininging mga datos na pinadala naman nila like iyon nga rin sa safety, sinabi nila na mayroong nagkaroon ng mga ganitong adverse events, may namatay... hiningi po namin lahat ng datos na iyon at binigay po nilang lahat iyon. So in fairness po, it was the most comprehensive, parang set of documents that we received from these vaccine companies 'no.

So ngayon iyong issue po naman dito sa Brazil, akala ko nga po ang Brazil ay may ginawang pagsusuri experimentally tungkol dito sa sinasabi nilang nagri-replicate iyong virus. Pero binasehan lang po nila ay iyong mga datos na mayroong sinasabing threshold – I don't know kung paano ko po mai-explain iyon in a not technical way – iyong threshold na posibleng mayroong konting replicating viruses pero hindi necessarily nakita iyon.

So iyon po ang pinag-uusapan, mukhang na-misunderstand po noong Brazil iyon but of course we are closely monitoring anong magiging explanation ng both sides. Pero sa palagay namin, wala pong issue kasi iyong mga ibang mga countries, at least we have three, in real world conditions, wala pong naging problema sa safety or even sa efficacy nitong mga bakuna na ito.

So masusi po nating susundan ano talaga ang—mukhang mayroon pong hindi nagkakaugnay din sa hanay ng mga nasa Brazil kasi mayroon din pong mga espesyalista, mga immunologist and other scientists na nagulat na mukhang may hindi naintindihan doon sa mga dokumento ng Sputnik V. Iyon po, Secretary Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: Dr. Gloriani, 'di ba po sa lahat ng bakuna na pinag-aralan ninyo parang Sputnik V lang ang pinuntahan ng mga miyembro ng expert panel iyong manufacturing facility. Tama ba ho ito?

DR. GLORIANI: Hindi po. Hindi po kami pumunta diyan. Kay Ambassador kami pumunta.

SEC. ROQUE: Ah okay, maraming salamat po. Okay. Now bago tayo magpatuloy 'no, just—iyong computation po – at 700 beds at 70% utilization, kung gagawin po iyang 1,148 total beds, ang utilization rate po ay bababa po ng 42.68%.

Okay, pumunta na po tayo sa—pero Dr. Gloriani, may isa pa akong tanong sa inyo. May mga kritiko na nagsasabi na mas malala pa raw ang Pilipinas kaysa sa India. Tama ba ho ito?

DR. GLORIANI: Naku, unfair naman po iyan. In fairness ha, ang ating mortality rate ay mababa. Maaaring tumaas ngayon and we attribute that to the variants po. So medyo naging lax din po ang ating mga mamamayan, iyan 'yun, noong nag-umpisa iyan. Kasi tiningnan din ho namin 'no, sinusundan namin – nag-flatten tayo ng epidemic curve tapos by February/March, 'ayun umakyat na naman po kasi, well marami na rin pong naging lax.

So I think that is unfair to say that and siguro hindi naman din ano, kasi iyong sa India naman nangyari iyong nangyari dahil din po siguro iyong kanilang mga religious festivities tapos iyong kanilang double variant ngayon na we hope wala pa po sa atin. Mukhang malakas iyong tama noong double variant na iyon in terms of—higher, higher talaga po ang transmissibility niya.

At base doon sa mga naging press releases ng kanilang mga eksperto, actually kagabi 'no sinasabi na kahit mga bata ay medyo severe, medyo ibang klase po sigurong variant ito than what we would normally get from iyong UK, iyong South Africa, medyo kakaiba po. So hindi ko po makukumpara iyong Pilipinas at iyong nangyayari sa India.

SEC. ROQUE: Last na last na ma'am 'no. Mayroon pong report na isang pulis na namatay 'no matapos siyang maturukan ng Sinovac. Mayroon na ba hong ebidensiya na iyong pagkamatay nitong pulis na ito ay dahil po sa Sinovac?

DR. GLORIANI: Ay, iinvestigahan po sir iyan ng ating NAEFIC kasi iyon 'yung agency natin, National Adverse Events Following Immunization Committee na titingnan iyan. Well hindi po natin ini-expect na kahit sino na nabakunahan ay mamamatay. Maari pong mayroon iyan ibang kondisyon na nakapagdulot noong ano, iyong kunyari to the heart attack or something pero hindi po related. Pero titingnan po.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming, maraming salamat Dra. Nina Gloriani – Department of Science and Technology - Vaccine Expert Panel Head.

Pumunta na po tayo sa ating open forum. Usec. Rocky, please...

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Good afternoon Secretary Roque at sa atin pong mga bisita.

From MJ Blancaflor of Daily Tribune: President Duterte signed the 1.3 billion pesos free WiFi project into law in 2017. Will he include an update on the project in his last State of the Nation Address this July?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I have a personal interest po dito sa libreng WiFi dahil ako po'y naging pangunahing awtor ng libreng WiFi na batas 'no noong 17th Congress. At ang tapatan lang po, mula noon hanggang ngayon eh talagang medyo nakakabahala po iyong bagal nang pag-implement nitong libreng WiFi 'no. Sa katunayan po dapat magbibigay po tayo ng 120,000 na libreng WiFi sites 'no sa buong Pilipinas at mga sampung libo lang po ang mayroon tayo ngayon 'no.

Kaya nga po iyong mga tanong dito tungkol sa 'di umano itong foreign contractor na ito ay nagpasok ng mga imported component na undervalued at nagtangka pa na manuhol. Well ganito po ang posisyon natin diyan 'no: Iyong kontrata pong iyan ay pinasok pa sa panahon ni dating Acting Secretary Usec. Rio at ito po ay in cooperation with the UNDP.

Now we had high hopes po dahil nandiyan naman po iyong mga multilateral agencies diyan na mabilis iyong rollout 'no; pero mabagal nga po 'no. And with this latest controversy, ang posisyon po talaga ng Presidente at ng DICT ay itigil na iyong involvement nitong current contractor, na foreign contractor na ito at ibalik na iyong mga pera na naibayad na sa kanila dahil pupuwede na pong ipagpatuloy iyan ng ating DICT.

Iyong mga panahon po iyan na tinuloy iyan, dahil nga po wala pang kakayahan iyong ating DICT na DICT mismo ang magpatayo nitong mga libreng WiFi sites na ito. Pero ngayon po eh may ganiyang kakayahan na mag-rollout ang DICT at sa katunayan po na sa taong 2020 alone eh nakapag-install po ang DICT nang 500% more WiFi sites compared doon sa mga total na install nitong foreign contractor na ito from the year 2015 to 2019.

So ang current status po niya, well bilang isang pangunahing awtor noong batas, siyempre po hindi tayo happy. Kinakailangan ang pangako natin libreng WiFi sa lahat, dapat magkaroon pa rin iyan ng katuparan sa administrasyon ni Presidente Duterte and we have 1 year to go. And considering na 10,000 pa lang sites po ang naitatayo out of 120,000 kailagnan double time talaga. Pero with the recent performance of DICT na 500% ang kanilang mas maraming sites na naitayo compared to the past 5 years 'no, 2015 to be accurate 'no—naku nawala na. But I think for the past 5 years eh we have confidence po na kung hindi naman maabot iyong 10,000 ay close to 10,000 ay makakabit natin.

Kasi po talagang iyan po ay inaasahan lalong-lalo na ng mga millennials sa Pilipinas at importante po ang WiFi talaga na isang human rights na po iyan. Karapatang-pantao na po iyan, ang tawag po diyan ay right to connectivity. So asahan ninyo po na habang nakaupo pa si Presidente, siya naman po ang nag-certify urgent ng batas na iyan kaya naipasa ko nang mabilis po iyan sa Mababang Kapulungan, eh titingnan naman po natin kung talagang

mapapatupad natin ‘yan ‘no – 10,000 sites installed; 120,000 so 110,000 sites left to go. Pero sa bilis naman po ng galaw ng DICT ngayon, we have confidence that we can meet at least close to the target if not a 110,000 more sites.

USEC. IGNACIO: Second question po niya: The BOC caught Speedcast, the contractor daw po tasked to import to the telco equipment needed for the WiFi project undervaluing its shipment and bribing Customs workers to get away with it. As far as Palace is concerned daw po, should the government suspend or kick out Speedcast from the project for allegedly violating Customs laws?

SEC. ROQUE: Iyan po ay iinvestigahan ng DICT. Pero siyempre po may penal clause na tinatawag ang ating Customs and Tariff Code na mayroon ding kriminal na parusa doon sa mga lalabag sa Customs and Tariff Code kasama at kasama na po diyan iyong mga nag-a-undervalue ‘no kasi technical smuggling po iyan kung nag-a-undervalue.

Pero gaya ng sinabi ko po kanina eh talagang hindi po happy ang gobyerno sa performance nitong ating contractor. Pasensiyahan na po ‘no at as an author of the Free WiFi Law, ‘di po katanggap-tanggap ‘no na many years after we passed this into law ay 10,000 sites pa lang ang naikakabit.

So I think ang posisyon po ay gumawa na ng hakbang ang DICT na ibalik na nga po iyong mga sobrang bayad na naibigay diyan sa foreign contractor na iyan, bayaran sila sa mga na-installed nilang sites pero ngayon po mas mabilis pa ang DICT mag-install ng mga libreng WiFi sites.

USEC. IGNACIO: Iyong third question po niya: The heads of the Senate Committee on Public Services and the House Committee on Good Government and Accountability have expressed their intent to probe the WiFi project over alleged smuggling, bribery and negligence on the part of the DICT. Will the Palace launch its own investigation?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, it’s being investigated now by the DICT and we support any further investigation to be conducted by the legislative branch of government as part of their oversight functions.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Usec. Punta tayo kay Mela Lesmoras, please.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Hi. Good afternoon Secretary Roque at sa ating mga guest po. Secretary Roque, unang question lang po on OFW concerns. Sa Malacañang side, ano po kaya iyong latest orders ni Pangulong Duterte para nga ma-ensure iyong kapakanan ng ating mga kababayan abroad? Like sa India and other countries may COVID-19 surge and even sa Hong Kong may nakaambang forced COVID-19 vaccine requirement po.

SEC. ROQUE: Well unang-una po ‘no, we ask our OFWs of course na sumunod po doon sa mask, hugas, iwas kasi iyan lang po talaga ang sandata natin. Pangalawa, naghahanda na nga po tayo noong mga hakbang para sa repatriation gaya ng sinabi ni Ambassador Ramon Bagatsing pero I think there will have to be a minimum number ‘di ba po Ambassador ‘no, para tayo’y maka-charter ng eroplano ‘no at iuwi sila ‘no. At siguro po it will be some time in the future kasi the total ban is until the 14th, pero that’s only like what, 12 days to go, 11 days to go matatapos na rin iyong ban.

Pangatlo po, iniengganyo po natin ang ating mga OFWs na magpabakuna rin po kung nasaan man sila kasi ang alam ko po ang pagbabakuna naman ay sinasakop ang lahat ‘no. We are not safe until everyone is safe ‘no, ‘yan po ang motto sa buong daigdig.

At pang-apat po ay mayroon naman po tayong consular at iba pang assistance na binibigay para doon sa mga magkakasakit at babawiin ng buhay ‘no. Napakalaki po ng ginagastos natin ngayon para sa pag-uwi ng mga OFWs natin na nawalan ng trabaho at handa pa rin po tayong iuwi ang lahat ng gustong umuwi lalung-lalo na iyong mga nagkasakit na pero siyempre po ‘no may limitation – kinakailangan ma-observe muna iyong mandatory quarantine period bago po ma-repatriate ‘no. So iyan po, wala pong tigil at noong last time po sinabi ko nga po, halos sampung bilyon na ang ating nagastos para po tulungan ang ating mga OFWs sa panahon po ng pandemya.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. And my second question Secretary Roque, on COVID-19 vaccines po. Mayroon po kaya tayong specific date na ina-eye na ito ngang pagdating noong mas malaking bulto ng Sputnik V vaccines? And idagdag ko lang Secretary Roque, kasi dati po nasabi ni Pangulong Duterte na ang preferred vaccine niya ay from China or Russia. Ngayong malabo pa iyong detalye sa Sinopharm, magpapabakuna na po kaya si Pangulong Duterte using Sputnik V naman po?

SEC. ROQUE: Sa una tanungin natin si Ambassador ‘no kasi ang dumating is 15,000 from the initial 500,000—ay hindi pala, sorry po. Si Ambassador pala is from India ano. So anyway, ang date po alam ko it’s within the month of May. Hindi ko lang po namemorya kung kailan ‘no pero importante po na magkaroon tayo ng trial order kasi negative 18 to 20 Celsius po ang temperature requirement ng Sputnik V, Gamaleya ‘no kaya po sa Metro Manila ibibigay po iyan. Bukas po magkakaroon tayo ng on-the-site briefing sa Parañaque, isa po doon sa siyudad na kung saan gagamitin po nila itong Sputnik V. So Mayor Olivarez, kasama namin kayo bukas.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. And sa pagbabakuna lang po sir ni Pangulong Duterte. May chance kaya na Sputnik V—

SEC. ROQUE: Tatanungin ko po siya. I’m happy to announce that finally I am allowed to attend the meetings with the President in person and tatanungin ko po siya mamaya if he will now consider Sputnik V.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. Panghuli na lang, Secretary Roque. So, ibig sabihin po ba may Talk to the People mamaya?

SEC. ROQUE: Mayroon po. Mayroon po and I'm looking forward to it because isang buwan po akong hindi naka-in person attendance sa mga Talk to the People.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Okay. Salamat po, Secretary Roque at sa ating mga guest.

SEC. ROQUE: Salamat, Mela. Punta na tayo kay Usec. Rocky, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Okay, Secretary. Tanong mula kay Kris Jose ng Remate/Remate Online: Paki-clarify daw po and expound iyong sinabi ninyo last Friday that food and personal care establishment can operate beyond 10% capacity if they comply with the JMC No. 21-01 – or 2021 daw po ito, I think Joint Memorandum Circular ito. How it hard is it to comply with this circular? Pahingi rin daw po ng examples.

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman po mahirap iyan 'no. Unang-una kinakailangan lahat po ng regulatory requirements at registration ay complied noong istablisiyemento, kasama po diyan iyong mga Mayor's permit, mga DTI, SEC registration or DOT accreditation. Pangalawa po dapat gumagamit sila ng StaySafe.ph or kung anumang contact tracing tools na integrated sa StaySafe, so importante po iyan. Pangatlo, kinakailangan mayroon silang kakayahan at napatunayan nang kakayahan na magpatupad ng minimum health standards kasama na po iyong limitation sa seating at saka iyong sa ventilation. Importanteng-importante po iyang ventilation, iyong engineering alteration ng establishments to promote ventilation.

Mayroon po kasing certification process iyan, kung mayroon talaga silang napatunayang kakayahan na, bibigyan sila ng safety seal. Kaya nga po ang sinasabi natin sa ating mga kababayan, let us patronize po iyong mga establishments na mayroon ng safety seal. Dahil napatunayan na po iyan na may kakayahan silang magpatupad ng minimum health standards.

USEC. IGNACIO: Iyon susunod pong tanong ay mula kay Jam Punzalan ng ABS-CBN online: Does Malacañang approved daw DFA Secretary Locsin's statement that China should get the F*** out of the West Philippine Sea? Is the use of expletive, a signal that the Philippines is changing its rhetoric and diplomatic tactic against Beijing?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi po namin pinanghihimasukan ang karapatan ng malayang pananalita ni Secretary Locsin.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Punta po tayo kay Hannah Sancho please.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: Hi Secretary, good afternoon po.

SEC. ROQUE: Good afternoon, Hannah.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: Secretary, iyong grupo ng mga nurses po Sir, idinadaing po nila iyong hindi po pantay, suweldo po ng mga nurse 1 at nurse 2. Sinasabi rin po nila hanggang ngayon hindi pa rin sila nakakatanggap ng benepisyo tulad ng mga food allowance at hiling po nila na kung maaari ay makipag-dayalogo po sila sa Department of budget and Management. Ano po ang tugon ng Palasyo dito, Sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, siguro si Usec. Vega. I am sorry, Usec. Vega, but I have to put you on the spot, dahil you are also acting-OIC, as Usec for Finance ng DOH. So, ang tanong po nila is again, number one, iyong difference ng suweldo sa nurse 1 at nurse 2 at saka iyong hindi natatanggap na anong allowance, food allowance?

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: Food allowance and hazard pay.

SEC. ROQUE: Food allowance and hazard pay, Usec. Vega?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Okay, thank you, Hannah for the query. Alam ninyo iyong starting position talaga ng nurse 1, as abided by DBM because of the Supreme Court ruling, nurse 1 becomes from 11 top salary grade 15. Victorious nga iyong pagpasok ng nurse 1 entry level pero na-distort po iyong paid grade nila, kasi halos pareho na sila ng nurse 2. Ito iyong sinasabi ng Department of Health na we need to adjust the nurse 2 position into a higher level grade para hindi naman sila pare-pareho ng nurse 1. So, iyong aming proposal ngayon for a higher salary grade for nurse 2 is with DBM right now, kasi hindi kaagad magkaroon ng resolution, dahil kailangan nga daw sabi ng DBM legal basis to do that. And we are also writing the senate committee sa Congress, both houses para malaman din iyong situation wherein the nurse 2 should have a higher grade position. And that is the position actually ng Department of Health na dapat mas mataas ng salary grade iyong nurse 2 position.

Doon naman sa food allowance, kung lahat ng mga regional health offices at saka regional centers po under the Department of Health, ibinaba na po namin, na sub-allot na namin iyan since last year iyong food allowance. Pero iyong corporate facilities, lalung-lalo na dito sa Metro Manila, Heart Center at Kidney Institute, gusto po nila ang disbursement po noon lalo na iyong food provision into food allowance.

So sinasabi na po namin ito, na sinabi ng COA sa amin na kailangan talaga may imprimatur ang President for converting food provision to a food allowance. So, sinulatan na po namin iyong Office of the Executive Secretary po tungkol nga diyan. And secondly, we have already talked with the Alliance of Health Workers na sinabihan po namin na the only way to do that for provision to cash would be through the Executive Secretary to the President. So these are the issues that are pending.

And for the hazard, alam ninyo, since last year nabigay na namin iyong hazard, hazard and even the special risk allowance, tapos na po iyon. But what we are asking for DBM right now

is the hazard pay from January to June of this year. So, we are asking a budget for that, because hindi na kinaya ng Bayanihan 2. So, we are hoping that we will be given that provision from DBM, so we can actually easily download the hazard pay and the special risk allowance.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: All right. Usec. Vega no need na po ba na magsagawa pa ng dialogue iyong Philippine Nurses Association with the DBM po?

DOH USEC. VEGA: We had a dialogue last Saturday with the nursing association and they invited DBM pero wala iyong DBM doon. So, probably they will ask DBM to honor their invitation the next time around.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: All right. Thank you, Usec. Vega. Secretary, mayroon pong tanong dito. Israeli ambassador said they cannot donate excess vaccines to the Philippines because of their contract to the said pharmaceutical companies, what are the options of the government?

USEC. IGNACIO: So far po, we may have to talk to the manufacturers to allow it. Kasi it was their condition. Pero we will see po, anything can be agreed upon naman po.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: Sir, last question ko na lang, Sir regarding doon sa Hong Kong, Sir. Mandatory po na kailangan iyong mga OFWs kailangan po nilang magpa-vaccinate ng COVID-19 vaccine. Sinasabi kasi ng consul na parang sini-single out daw po iyong mga OFWs natin and sinasabi din ni Foreign Secretary Locsin dapat lahat ng nationality, hindi lang Pilipino. Ano po ang position ng Philippines kasi sabi ng DOLE, hindi sagot ang OFW sa planong mandatory COVID-19 vaccination ng Hong Kong sa foreign domestic workers po?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we go with the statement of Secretary Locsin of course. Alam po ninyo ang equal protection clause is not just a provision in the Philippine Bill of rights, it is accepted already in the international covenant in civil and political rights at sakop po ng kanyang applicability ang Hong Kong. So sana po huwag i-single out ang ating mga Filipino OFWs, bagama't we recognize iyong sovereign prerogative na i-require ang bakuna. Let me tell everyone po na we have an early 1905 case na sinustain po ng Korte Suprema ng Pilipinas ang mandatory vaccination against smallpox as forming part and parcel of police powers. Pero pati po ang exercise ng police power, it must be done in a manner na lahat po ng tao eh sasakupin. Huwag naman pong magkakaroon ng singling out.

HANNAH SANCHO/SONSHINE MEDIA NETWORK: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat po, Hannah. And Hannah buti na lang nandito si Usec. Vega, actually ang request ko lang po iyong mga factual questions ay ipadala po ninyo ahead of time, because I would have not known how to answer your question, mabuti na lang po nandito si Usec. Vega. So please submit po ahead of time, your factual questions para mapadala natin sa appropriate line agency.

Okay, we now proceed to Usec. Rocky please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, thank you, Secretary. Tanong mula kay Leila Salaverria of Inquirer para po kay Ambassador Bagatsing: Could you provide lang daw po update sa COVID positive Filipinos in India? How are they doing and what kind of health care are they receiving in light of the crisis in the country?

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: Salamat, Usec. Rocky ‘no. So far, we have received about 73 COVID positive cases na Filipino dito sa atin and sa tulong ng FilCom, what we have oden is to create, well, provided them all the information and the numbers that they can communicate with the embassy, importante is access and the lines of communication are open. So they can get in touch with us through Facebook and then email and text.

And FilCom here have put up a chat group. And because of that, sa tulong ng DFA we have arranged a system wherein iyong mga COVID support group ang tawag diyan, in terms of medicines and the supplies and the food requirements, we can address their issues ‘no kasi napakalaki ng India. You know, it will take you two and a half hours to fly from Delhi to Janai.

So we have satellite groups of Filipino communities, at nagti-text iyan, nagtsa-chat group kami, sinasabi ito ang sitwasyon ng isang Pilipino. So iyong mga Pilipino sa lugar na iyon ang nagtutulungan and the embassy provides as much support as we can on our own.

But we have the go signal from the DFA, that we had a townhall meeting last Friday with the Filipino community here, nag-usap-usap sila at nakita naman ng DFA ang pangangailangan ng ating mga kababayan at handa namang tumulong. So we that very good coordination and support ang nakukuha namin from the FilCom, the DFA and the embassy.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Ambassador.

For Secretary Roque: Secretary Roque, how does Malacañang view the report that 25 billion in calamity funds from 2020 and 2021 were still unutilized as of March as these are still pending approval? Why is this the case when spending these funds is supposed to be urgent in this time of a pandemic?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, unang-una po, sang-ayon po kay Secretary Wendel Avisado, and I will quote him, “Iyang mga calamity funds pong iyan ay rini-release as the need arises. We cannot just release without any reason or justification.” Iyong natural calamities daw po ay hindi nangyayari sa isang beses lamang so kinakailangan i-release po iyan kapag humingi po ‘no in response to a particular disaster or natural calamity.

Now—at siyempre po, iyong pag-release niyan ay mayroon ding approval ng ating Presidente.

Nasa Mayo pa lang po tayo, so iyong budget sa 2021, siyempre po nandiyan pa iyan dahil hindi naman dapat gastusin lahat 'no dahil baka mamaya iyong ibang aberyang mangyayari sa 2021 ay wala na po tayong pondo 'no.

Now, si Usec. Jalad naman po, who is head of NDRRMC, ay kinontak din natin. At ang sinabi po niya in response to the headline article sa isang peryodiko ngayon eh sinama daw po kasi doon sa halaga na allegedly unspent ay iyong budget for 2021; and as explained by Secretary Wendel, eh siyempre kinakailangang hindi mo gastusin lahat iyan dahil iyong calamity funds mo for 2021 is until December of 2021.

Pero ito po ang breakdown na binigay sa akin ni Usec. Jalad, ang head po ng NDRRMC, sa 2021 po, 20 billion ang budget nila inclusive of 13 billion regular National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (NDRRMF); five billion Marawi Rehabilitation Fund; two billion insurance premium for government assets against calamities. Ang naaprubahan po ng OP ay 2,818,792,000, ang balanse po niya is 15,181,027,000.

Now, ang on process pong mga proyekto na pupondohan ay 8.23 billion. Tapos mayroon din pa po silang identified needs from effects of Typhoon Quinta, Rolly, Ulysses na 35 billion. So makikita natin na in fact kulang iyong natitirang pondo for 2021 for what is needed as a result of Quinta, Rolly and Ulysses of 31 billion.

Pagdating naman po doon sa 2020, 16 billion po iyong budget ng NDRRMC; nagkaroon po ng augmentation, naging 22,794,698,000, less OP approved 20,771,925,000. Ang balance lang po nila is 2 billion 22.

So parang bloated po iyong nasa pahayagan na hindi po ginagastos na national calamity funds. Siyempre po hindi gagastusin lahat dahil kinakailangang mag-save ng pondo para sa darating na calamity funds at iyon nga po 'no, marami ring mga kinakailangan pa para sa Quinta, Rolly at Ulysses. So huwag po kayong mag-alala, magagastos po lahat iyan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Iyong second question po niya: What will it do to fast-track daw po the release of the funds especially since it is relying on the 2021 budget to stimulate the economy?

SEC. ROQUE: Let me correct you po 'no, kasi as Secretary Wendel says, the release of the funds, hindi po pinag-aawayan iyan; it's been released to the appropriate agency. Ang appropriate agency po for the calamity funds is NDRRMC. Iyong pag-release naman ng NDRRMC has to be in response to a specific natural disaster at saka subject to OP approval. At iyong mga figures na binasa ko po, nagpapakita na wala naman pong delay na masyado 'no. Siyempre po may paperwork, alam ninyo naman talaga iyan, ganiyan talaga sa gobyerno, hindi ka puwedeng gumastos-gastos nang walang compliance with COA requirements.

Pero hind po naman totoo iyong lumalabas na balita na para bagang ang dami nang nangyaring aberya, nandiyan ang sangkatutak na pera na hindi naman po nagagastos.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes. Trish Terada of CNN, please.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Hi! Good afternoon, Spox and to Usec. Bong Vega and Dr. Nina po.

Sir, first lang po 'no, since you mentioned about foresight but of course this is on a different topic. I just wanted to ask where the IATF is in terms of planning or handling the COVID response in light of the new variants because we understand, there are some efforts to increase the number of beds, isolation facilities. But is the IATF already at the point of anticipating or, you know, having some sort of foresight. Sa scenario na nangyayari for example in India should worse come to worst, do we have a Plan A or Plan B; have we or are we securing medicines and oxygen tanks already in case of a worst-case scenario?

SEC. ROQUE: I will response to that first. Nakita ninyo po na with the additional ICU beds that we have, bumaba na po to 42% ang utilization rate natin. Although, this is subject to verification kasi ako lang ang nag-compute. Kasi nga sa datos ng DOH, and let's flash that on the screen again, eh 700 pa lang ang ICU beds natin; this has been increased to 100.

Now, are we going to stop at 1,000? No! We are proceeding to come up with additional ICU beds as mentioned by Usec. Vega. And, Usec. Vega, I will confirm that ako na on my own ay as a result of my own hospitalization experience 'no, I'm pushing for at least 200 additional ICU beds 'no.

So that's part and parcel of the foresight kasi nga we can never say if what happened to India will not happen. Kaya nga po tayo ay nagta-travel ban ngayon. Pero ang warning nga po ng WHO, kinakailangan ding isama rin sa travel ban iyong mga lugar kung saan mataas ang traffic involving passengers from India, at kasama po diyan iyong Middle East. So iyan po ang problema ngayon dahil hindi naman natin pupuwedeng i-ban ang mga bansa, ang mga biyahero galing sa Middle East lalung-lalo na dahil ang dami nating OFWs doon. So pinag-aaralan po ngayon iyan.

So iyong pagdadagdag pa, pagpapalaki ng ating healthcare capacity is the long-term plan right now because we all know that it's cheaper to invest in health infrastructure rather than to close the economy muli. So I think with the additional beds that we have provided 'no, I think pagdating po ng 14, at the end of the MECQ, there will be confidence in announcing another qualification for classification for Metro Manila and the surrounding provinces.

Perhaps, si Usec. Vega could add to what I just said. Ano raw iyong mga hakbang na ginagawa natin by way of foresight to address an India-like pandemic?

USEC. VEGA: Okay. Thank you, Triciah. Thank you, Spox Harry.

For foresight, you have to deal really with certain strategies on different platforms. The first is the suppression of the virus. I think the IATF is very well ahead in terms of making sure that the virus will not spread, will not replicate to an extent that we will be having a hard time in terms of our capacity.

Nakita naman natin na we are always looking into the angle that if we have to do a general quarantine or enhanced quarantine, this has to be based on the data that we have on the ground. So foresight on the suppression means especially with the IATF that there are always looking for data that the variants should not spread, they should be contained, and the PDITR especially for contact tracing, isolation and testing must be there. In other words, expanding the isolation, contact tracing. So I think the IATF has been always on that strategy.

The second strategy or the platform that we should look into also is in the health capacity. Meaning to say, the number of beds, the number of isolation facilities or quarantine. I think for the longest time, we have been trying to adjust especially since learning from the last pandemic, how we can best improve our health system capacity by improving on our infrastructure and making sure that we have the desired human resource, and of course the technology or the equipment for it.

And I think the last foresight that they're also looking and strategizing is really on vaccination. You can see that the plan of the vaccine cluster is well within a list wherein they have been trying to program and plan for the different vaccines that are coming because our vaccination can really start as much as we would like to do if the supply is there.

But they have been planning for this, I mean, since last year. So, in other words, for me, the IATF has always been on the forefront in terms of strategizing specially on those three fronts on how best we can resolve this pandemic.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you, Sir. Sir, just a clarification doon po sa nabanggit ni Spox na other classification for NCR Plus. How likely is it that we're going to shift to GCQ after May 14 given the higher number of beds or higher number of health care capacity by that time?

DOH USEC. VEGA: We still have to make sure that the number of cases have really decreased and that our efforts to suppress the virus is there and the transmission rate is below 1 or even a minimum figure to make sure that the virus or the variant doesn't replicate.

So, we'll see what the trend would be at that time and the IATF will actually decide especially on the attack rate and of course the two-week growth rate, and the health capacity of the region or the NCR.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you, Usec. Vega. Next question maybe for Secretary Roque. Sir, si Ambassador Bagatsing mentioned that – or to Ambassador Bagatsing po 'no – he mentioned that the Bharat Biotech can immediately ship out the vaccines once all

documentary processes have been expedited. What's keeping the processing of Covaxin documents long and considering Sir, na may EUA na siya especially ngayon na may directive po si Pangulo na hindi dapat tumagal ng three days iyong pagpoproseso ng mga dokumento or iyong mga regulatory work po?

SEC. ROQUE: Ambassador Bagatsing?

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: Yes, thank you. Well, my information is that there is still one document required by the FDA to have a full approval for the EUA of Bharat Biotech for their vaccine, Covaxin. And the other requirement I believe was on the Department of Finance review on their pricing scheme.

So, if those two hurdles are settled then the orders can be made and the shipments can follow. So, iyon lang po ang balita ko na regulatory requirements na kinakailangan pa nilang tapusin.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Pero, Sir, when do you see it happening? And eight million darating po ba iyon, I mean, probably this month?

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: Well, as I've said you know, it's a moving target eh. Ang guarantee lang sa akin is, once na full approval is secured then we can rollout and export the vaccines there. The point is, you know, here in India anything related to vaccine and – no offense to anybody – anything related to vaccines, cures, medicines, etc., the regulatory process is expedited so that approval is secured right away and the bottom line, whatever medicines are out there, equipment that are necessary, it go straight to the recipient – the patients, and the families who would need these kinds of medicines.

So, just a point lang, Tricia, if you don't mind, Secretary, just to give you a perspective here. From October last year to March, the cases of COVID here was 5.9 million. This whole month of April, the COVID cases were 6.9 million. In other words, in one month's time they have had 6.9 million compared to six months from October to March – 5.9. So, iyan ang nakakabulaga and they were really caught unprepared. Sabi nga ni Modi, "This is once in a century crisis." So, if there is any lessons that we can learn, just consider that 'no.

And the cases of death from November to March was 40,800. In one month, this April, cases of death, 48,700. So, you could just see how overwhelmed the health care services were. So, tuluy-tuloy pa rin ang vaccine – going back to your point – tuluy-tuloy pa rin ang vaccine at saka importante talaga na one way or another ma-strengthen natin ang ating immune system through these vaccines.

Thank you.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you very much, Ambassador. Secretary Roque, just one last question for you. Si General Sinas is retiring this week. Who will be the next PNP

Chief? Will the President be making the announcement soon? Will there be an extension and sino po iyong mga 'contenders' natin ngayon?

SEC. ROQUE: I know he has made a decision but I'm not at liberty to announce anything unless I have the appointment paper and this is a well established practice of my office.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you, Spox.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you very much, Trish. We go back to Usec. Rocky, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary. From Adrian Ayalin of ABS-CBN: May mga binuksang industriya under MECQ pero wala pang bakuna ang mga economic frontliners. Binuksan sila kasi kailangan, pero paano daw po ang proteksyon nila?

SEC. ROQUE: Mask, hugas, iwas, at pagdating po ng bakuna, idagdag ang bakuna.

USEC. IGNACIO: Iyong una pong tanong ni Kylie Atienza ng Business World ay nabanggit ninyo na, Secretary, sa tanong ni Leila Salaverria iyong unutilized fund. Pero iyong kaniya pong follow-up: In a tweet yesterday, former Socioeconomic planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia said the government's lack of sense of urgency has clearly shown in responding to and managing the pandemic. He said the health system hardly improve and pandemic response spending is the lowest in ASEAN. Wala ba po daw sense of urgency and Administrasyon sa gitna ng pandemya? Does the Administration plan to fast track the release of the unspent calamity funds?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, unang-una po ano, hindi naman po talaga unspent calamity funds iyan kasi mayroon po talagang nakareserba. Uulitin ko po, nakareserba talaga iyan dahil Mayo pa lang may mga darating pang mga aberya.

Now, pangalawa po, well, nakita ninyo naman po iyong expansion natin ng ating health care capacity: Gumagawa tayo ng modular hospitals, nai-increase natin ang ICU beds at magpapatuloy pa po iyan, hindi po tayo titigil.

At pagdating po sa lack of sense of urgency, sa tingin ko naman po dahil lahat po tayo ay mayroong mga kamag-anak na pupuwedeng magkasakit, ako nagkasakit na, hindi po naman tama na may lack of sense of urgency dahil lahat tayo nais natin is to spare as many of our family and friends from this vicious virus.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Melo Acuña, please.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Good afternoon, Secretary! This is for you and for the good Ambassador Bagatsing. Do you see scenarios similar to Australia where Australia barred

Australian nationals from returning to their country from India? Those who will violate will either be fined or jailed? Do you see such a situation in the Philippines?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, alam ninyo po may ruling na tayo – Marcos vs Manglapus – na the right to return is a human right pero it is subject to police power. So, ang ating quarantine restrictions has also been recognized by the Supreme Court as a valid exercise of police power. Pero sa tingin ko naman po, ngayon iyong ating travel ban which applies equally to Filipinos is a similar measure adopted by the Philippine Government.

Kasi dati rati talaga, dahil sabi ni Presidente walang Pilipinong gustong umuwi na pupuwedeng pigilan, eh may exception tayo sa mga travel ban to allow the return of Filipinos. Pero pagdating po dito sa India, for the first time wala pong exception ‘no. Pero siyempre po mananaig pa rin iyong puso ng ating Presidente para sa ating mga OFWs at nakikita ko po baka nga po makakauwi na iyong ilang mga Pilipinong gustong makauwi pero subject to stricter quarantine dito sa Pilipinas including full 14-day quarantine regardless of their PCR results.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Mr. Ambassador, there are 1,319 Filipinos in your area of responsibility, with 73 afflicted with COVID-19. What are the chances of seeing them returning to the Philippines?

AMBASSADOR BAGATSING: Well, as soon as we hurdle those logistical difficulties including the travel ban imposed by our government effective until May 14, I’m getting the go signal from Secretary Locsin. We will do our best to bring them home. Again, as I said the easiest way is through commercial flights and once the Middle East lifts travel ban. Because anywhere you go right now from India via Hong Kong, via Singapore, or even via Australia or the United States, there are travel bans in these countries, so, [unclear] back to travel ban.

So, once these are lifted, these are the logistical nightmares we have to go through, once these are lifted then we can start the process of negotiations for them to come home. Worst case scenario, we have talked with our Defense department [unclear] military plane to carry our kababayans from here to Manila

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Thank you very much. Secretary Harry, there are courses requiring practicum, like those who’d like to become teachers undergo a practice teaching and nurses are deployed to hospitals or would be nurses are deployed to hospitals. Don’t you think there will be some changes in the curriculum because it may in a way affect their training and education, Mr. Secretary?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I think it’s case-to-case. In the case of iyong medical schools, they have asked for resumption of their internship and of course it is part of the national interest to make sure na mayroon tayong sapat na mga doktor so pinapayagan po sila ng IATF.

So lahat naman po nang mayroon na mga valid na dahilan para ipagpatuloy iyong kanilang mga internship, mga practice teaching, lahat po sila pupuwedeng humingi lang ng permiso sa IATF.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC: I see. Yeah, for Undersecretary Vega. Mr. Undersecretary, good afternoon. Have you noticed any turnover or the speed of turnover of doctors/nurses/medtechs and other professionals in government facilities over the past 12 months?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Thank you, Melo for the query ano. Right now what we are seeing actually is internal migration coming from—or the private sectors to the government. There is a big difference in pay scheme ‘no, alam natin iyan lahat. So in the last, I think last year and even the last few years, we have seen this kind of a transition, an internal migration mostly from private institutions to government because the government has a bit higher pay scale compared with the private.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC: I see. So no problem with manpower?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Right now in terms of manpower, that’s really a challenge because not only are we dealing with the internal migration but there is also external, iyong talagang pumupuntang abroad because they have already the contracts so on and so forth and the challenge really here especially with—in a setup wherein you need specialized units, ito iyong highly skilled personnel.

And you know, when you deal with highly skilled personnel like nurses and even doctors, they need to have some training and this is actually what some hospitals are doing right now to cope up with the gaps. Talagang they are trying to put in the necessary—halimbawa training in the intensive care units and this will—nabigyan sila ng CME units for this so that they can also—this will also be parang a gauge whether they can apply in a higher level position or even go for work abroad or in government. So there’s a very dynamic really with the changes in the human resource especially among nurses and doctors here in the Philippines.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC: Maybe next time we can come up with figures so that we will have a clearer picture, Mr. Undersecretary.

DOH USEC. VEGA: Yes, we can do that.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA DAILY PACIFIC: Yeah. Thank you very much. Thank you. Have a nice day. Secretary Harry, thank you very much.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you very much, Melo. Punta naman tayo kay Joseph Morong, please. O habang, yeah okay. Go ahead.

USEC. IGNACIO: Okay. Secretary, from Genalyn Kabling of Manila Bulletin: Has the President reached out Chinese President Xi Jin Ping to demand the pullout of the Chinese ships in the West Philippine Sea and ease the tension? Will the President consider revising his calibrated and calculated foreign policy on the West Philippine Sea and ask for outside help after China ignored the Philippines' protests against unlawful presence of their ships in our territory?

SEC. ROQUE: Let me check that the President was ignored 'no, that's not true. Dati po almost 200 'ata iyong mga barko diyan, ngayon kakaunti na lang po ang natitira. Kaya nga po ang pakiusap natin eh tuluyan nang lumisan sa lugar na iyan.

Now let me also clear na iyong pinag-uusapan natin ngayon bagama't kabahagi ng Philippine claim to the Kalayaan Group of Islands has never been in the possession of the Philippines. Para pong Sabah 'yan na may claim tayo na hindi naman natin na-possess. Iyong area po ngayon na kung saan nagtipun-tipon iyong mga mangingisda, iyan po iyong area kung saan malapit iyong mga isla na pinag-aagawan sa parte po ng Vietnam at ng Tsina, okay.

Dapat nga po ngayon, ipapakita ko lahat ngayon iyan pero masyadong mahaba iyong aking Power Point presentation, siguro po sa susunod na Lunes 'no dahil bukas we are in Parañaque for the Gamaleya vaccination 'no.

So hindi po totoo na in-ignore ang ating Presidente. I do have some data here ha, babasahin ko po ang data 'no. Siyempre hindi ko naman memoryado pero in response to the Philippine President's message to the Chinese Ambassador, ito naman po ang nangyari 'no.

Ito po ha. Okay, ang nangyari po dito ay mula po noong nagsalita ang Presidente, ito ha, 220 po in early March iyong mga barko 'no. Now dahil nga po doon sa pag-uusap ni Ambassador Wang at ni Presidente ay bumaba po iyong mga numero from 220, 136 po umalis at saka iyong second batch, another 65. So kung ia-add ninyo po iyong 136 at saka 65—ang hina ko talaga sa math 'no, dapat talagang—so 201 po ang umalis from the original 220.

So huwag po natin sabihing in-ignore ang ating Presidente 'no kasi mga beinte na lang po ang natitira diyan 'no. And I think that's 201 fishing vessels po ang umalis 'no and all because of the message of the President and the warm relations that we enjoy with China 'no. Siyempre po inaasahan natin itong mga buwan na ito na mas marami pang fishing vessels na aalis diyan 'no. Doon sa natitirang kakaunti, we're still hoping na aalis po sila.

USEC. IGNACIO: Okay. Iyong second po niyang tanong, ni Genalyn ay para po kay Ambassador Bagatsing pero nasagot na po ni Ambassador ito, about doon sa assistance ng Philippines sa India at maging iyong planong repatriation. Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Joseph Morong, please.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Hi sir, good afternoon. Good afternoon Ambassador, Dr. Gloriani. I have a short question lang po for Dr. Nina. Ma'am, good afternoon po. How are you doing?

Ma'am iyon pong sa Sputnik lang, iyon pong recommendation. Kanino po ito puwedeng gamitin? Is this beyond 59 or hanggang 59 lang po?

DR. GLORIANI: Beyond, 18 above. Wala siyang ano—mayroon silang datos sa elderly.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: So puwede po kahit mga hanggang sa senior—

DR. GLORIANI: 80 years old.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sige ma'am, salamat po for your time. Secretary Roque, can I go to Usec. Vega, please? Dr. Vega, good afternoon sir. Sir my question is about your figures po. Iyon pong nabanggit natin na mga figures ng increases sa ICU and isolation beds, these are NCR figures sir 'no? And by May 14 po kaya sir, how many ICUs and isolation beds and ward beds would we have by May 14? Kasi you mentioned 367 iyong additional ngayon and we need to update the DOH data draft and then plus 110 sa private and 120 sa Tala. By May po ilan po kaya tayo, iyong total natin?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Thank you, Joseph ano. But to put it in perspective, the HCUR which is actually parang aggregate of the sum utilization of the intensive care units, isolation beds and the mechanical ventilators is now low, it's 57%. So medyo maganda na iyong HCUR natin for the NCR.

Ang nakikita namin ngayon, with an increase in the number of beds for the intensive care units, umabot na kami ng 1,148 or additional of 367 compared with last month of 781, okay. Pero on ground, the total number of patients that we have for the intensive care unit right now is 850 pa rin kasi matagal ang transition time niyan eh tapos may pumapasok pa before they can be discharged. So definitely we still have about mga 70/71 percent ang ating HCUR doon sa—kung disaggregated sa intensive care units. But generally, we are now hitting 57%, all right.

By May 14, in terms of the number of added intensive care units, we expect probably 50 plus or minus intensive care units to be added in our different facilities.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: That is assuming, Doctor, that the rates of infection remain? Hindi siya tataas more than what we are having right now?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Right! Ganito kasi iyan, at this present set up that we have in terms of this pandemic, wherein we average 8,000 to 9,000 ang aming computation through FASSTER and reported by IATF is you need a minimum of at least 300 more ICU beds. And we were able to do that at 367. However that is the minimum. To make sure that we have a buffer for this number of beds, you must hit 1,000, at least 1,000 beds for the buffer for this average number of new case that we have. So ang ginagawa po natin, because putting up an ICU is something, it's not an overnight thing, you need to prepare for it, because these are specialized units

needing technology, human resource and definitely a space that would have the necessary equipment and of course oxygen supply.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Sir, iyon pong computation ninyo, 367 nadagdag natin 100 private, plus 120 from Tala, that would only give you 597 ICU, so far. So tama na po ba iyan?

DOH USEC. VEGA: We are not saying Joseph that 367 is coming [from government], 110 coming the private, wala akong sinabi. I am only saying, the total number of ICUs that we were able to stay up and generate since last month is 367 to include mostly on the public sector and some private. But I don't have the figures kung ilan iyong sa private, basta total iyan, 367.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Sir, by May 14, that's the current level that we have for ICU 'no, because this is very critical for the patient, does that give you a confidence na we can relax to GCQ by May 14, if we have this amount of number of ICU beds? Does that give you, parang kaya ba nating mag-GCQ, given this number?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Hindi. Ganito kasi iyan, if there is an increase in the number of active cases, magla-lockstep iyang increase in the number of patients needing isolation and intensive care unit. So, the most important factor that we have really, we should be doing is suppression of the virus, meaning a very aggressive testing, contact tracing, isolation. Because if we suppress the virus with the transmission rate of less than 1, then the number of ICUs that you would like to be having is there. Kasi kakaunti na lang iyong papasok eh. So with the lessening or the decreasing number of cases that we have in the next several days, mas maganda iyon, because we are now better prepared compared with last month.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Okay Sir, thank you for your time. Secretary Roque same question. With the current level of ICU, does that give you or the IATF the level of confidence to think of GCQ because you've always said that we have to balance economy and then health?

SEC. ROQUE: Well there is a reason po 'no. Why we are in fact taking concrete steps to improve our health-care capacity. Kasi itong health-care capacity po is one important indicator for either the lowering or the heightening of community quarantine. So kung wala ka sa critical at kung wala ka man lang sa moderate and right now, kung tama iyong computation namin at 50%, ni wala ka sa moderate health-care capacity utilization, then that is one factor in considering a decrease in the community classification.

Now, ang babantayan natin iyong two-week attack rate, daily attack rate at iyong R Naught. And, so far now, ang R Naught natin is doing good; the World Standard is one and I think we have achieved that. So if we are able to maintain our R Naught, if we are able to maintain iyong attack rate na hindi classified as critical and we are able to improve our health-care capacity, then there is a distinct possibility pursuant to the formula adopted by the IATF that we would have a different quarantine classification. Pero of course the IATF is a collegial body, it will have to be made by the IATF as a body.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Different classification, you mean GCQ, Sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Well basta po, ma-maintain natin iyong ating R Naught at mapababa pa rin natin iyong ating mga attack rate at magpatuloy po itong additional health-care capacity natin, eh iyan po naman, sang-ayon sa formula, may warrant GCQ but that's a decision to be made by the IATF as a collegial body.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Sir, sa budget lang, si Usec. Joven ng DOF, nasa Laging Handa siya, and the he mentioned that 18.4 billion dollars ang utang natin and out of that number is 1.2 billion dollars allotted for vaccines. Now, he said that interest rate is at .6 to .8% per annum. So would be able to compute Sir, and can you give us the terms of payment? Ilang years po babayaran itong 8.4 and by the end of that term how much would we have owed this multilateral sources and bilateral sources that he announced?

SEC. ROQUE: Joseph, how I wish you asked that from the Usec in Laging Handa, but I am not prepared to answer that now. Alam mo naman mahina talaga sa Math.

Okay, maraming salamat, Joseph.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA NEWS: Sir, iyong Bayanihan 3 ba priority?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa pong naiisyu na certification. Maraming salamat, Joseph. Usec. Rocky please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, Secretary, tanong ni Racquel Bayan ng PBS: Paano daw po ang procedure kapag mag-lockdown ang isang government agency dahil sa COVID-19. Kanino i-address ang letter for clearance since GSIS sa QC ay may nasawi na due to COVID-19?

SEC. ROQUE: Ang alam ko po, wala naman talagang complete lockdown. Mayroon pong skeletal workforces sa mga tanggapan ng gobyerno.

USEC. IGNACIO: From Maricel Halili of TV 5: Israeli ambassador said they cannot donate excess vaccines to the Philippines because of contracts with pharmaceutical companies, what are the other options of government?

SEC. ROQUE: Asked and answered na po kanina.

USEC. IGNACIO: From Aileen Taliping of Abante Tonite: Hinarang umano ng Nayong Pilipino Foundation Board ang plano na magtayo ng temporary vaccination center sa nakatenggang property nila sa entertainment city kahit may endorsement na ang NTF at ni Department of Health Secretary Duque para sa planong walk-in at drive-thru vaccination facility sa sandaling ilarga na ang maramihang pagbabakuna laban sa COIVD-19. Ang mga kumukontra daw po ay appointees umano ng Malacañang sa Board, ano daw po ang masasabi ng Palasyo?

SEC. ROQUE: Ipagbibigay-alam ko na po ito kay ES as our primus inter pares and he would still have jurisdiction over trustees of Government Owned and Controlled Corporations.

USEC. IGNACIO: Okay. Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat po at dahil wala na po tayong mga katanungan, unang-una maraming-maraming salamat to Philippine Ambassador to India Ramon Bagatsing. Sir, maraming salamat po. Ang dami naming nakalap na impormasyon sa inyo.

Maraming salamat kay Usec. Leopoldo Vega. As usual, Usec. Vega huwag po sana kayong magsawa na maging guest sa aming Press Briefing at kay Dr. Nina Gloriani. Thank you very much, Ma'am of the DOST Vaccine Expert Panel Head.

Maraming salamat, Usec. Rocky. Maraming salamat sa ating mga kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps at siyempre po maraming salamat sa inyong lahat sa inyong patuloy na pagtangkilik sa ating Press Briefing.

Sa ngalan po ng ating Presidente Rodrigo Roa Duterte, ito po ang inyong Spox Harry nagsasabing, kaya po natin ito at malapit na po ang Merry Christmas.

Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat.

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