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News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE
JUNE 24, 2021 (12:05 P.M. – 12:58 P.M.)

SEC. ROQUE: Naku, a moment of silent muna po tayo and prayer for former President Benigno Aquino.

We commiserate po and condole with the family and loved ones of former President Benigno Simeon “Noy” Aquino III as we extend our condolences on his untimely demise.

We are grateful for the former President for his contribution and services to the country, and we ask our people to offer a prayer for the eternal repose of the former Chief Executive.

Rest in peace, Mr. President!

Binabalita po natin na dumating kaninang pasado alas siete ng umaga ang dalawang milyon na doses ng Sinovac. Sa latest batch ng Sinovac, 1.6 million doses ay binili ng national government, samantalang ang 400,000 doses ay binili ng IP Biotech para sa Lungsod ng Maynila. Ito ang pang-apat na batch ng Sinovac vaccines na dumating sa bansa.

As of June 22, 2021, halos siyam na milyon or 8,928,249 doses ang na-administer sa buong bansa. At noong Martes nga po, June 22, nasa 336,843 total doses ng COVID-19 vaccines ang ating na-administer. Kaya inaasahan na maabot natin ang 500,000 daily vaccination rate natin sa target.

Sa Quezon City, as of June 23, 2021, 8 A.M., nasa 526,542 or 33.97% ng 1.7 million Quezon City residents ang nakatanggap na ng first dose. At noong June 22, nakapag-administer ang Quezon City ng 41,826 doses; na-beat ng Quezon City ang sarili niyang record twice.

Sa Manila, nasa 35,572 ang kanilang nabakunahan noong Martes, June 22 – all time high po iyan. Talagang parami nang parami ang nababakunahan, masasabi natin na on track po tayo na maabot ang ating population protection or containment sa huling bahagi ng taon.

Uulitin ko, dalawang doses dapat; libre po ang mga ito; kailangan makakuha ng parehong dose para magkaroon ng pinakamataas na proteksiyon laban po sa COVID-19.

Kaugnay nito, mali ang projection ng isang UK think-tank na isa ang Pilipinas sa huling bansa sa Asya na makakamit ang herd immunity. Mukhang hindi nila na-update o hindi na-factor ang pagdating ng bultu-bultong bakuna natin. Nagsimula tayo nang kakaunti dahil sa limitadong supply ng Sinovac at AstraZeneca, ngunit tandaan natin na tuluy-tuloy na ang pagdating ng mga supply ng bakuna.

As of June 24, 2021, ayon sa NTF, mahigit labing-anim na milyon or 16,205,876 doses na ang dumating, kasama rito ang dalawang milyong Sinovac doses na dumating kaninang umaga.

Sa kaugnay na bagay, sa delayed delivery ng 50,000 Sputnik V component two vaccines, nakatanggap ang National Task Force ng pormal na komunikasyon mula sa Russian Direct Investment Fund na nag-inform na magkakaroon ng delay dahil sa ongoing upgrades at latest developments sa Sputnik V. Naabisuhan na ng NTF ang mga local governments na ma-reschedule ang pagtanggap ng second dose ng kanilang constituents. Wala nga pong dapat ikabahala, ayon sa Health Technology Assessment Council o HTAC, kanilang nirirekomenda na ang pagtanggap ng dalawang doses ay at least 21 days apart.

Nagpahayag din ang Gamaleya Institute sa pamamagitan Russian Direct Investment Funds sa ating Food and Drug Administration ang kanilang nais na amendahan na interval period ng two doses ng Sputnik V mula sa minimum na 21 days at gawin itong 90 days. Pinag-aaralan na ng FDA ang request na ito.

Kasama sa mga lugar ng bibigyan-prayoridad sa pagbabakuna, liban sa NCR Plus, ay ang Plus 10 na tinatawag. So mayroon po tayong NCR Plus 8, Plus 10. Ano po iyong Plus 10? Ito po ang Bacolod, ang Iloilo, ang Cagayan de Oro, ang Baguio, ang Zamboanga, ang Dumaguete, ang Tuguegarao, ang General Santos, ang Naga at ang Legazpi. Ang naging basehan ay ang tumataas nilang mga kaso or surge in cases, ang kanilang pagiging highly urbanized at dense environment, at kanilang kontribusyon sa regional or national economy.

Samantala, kasama ko kaninang umaga sa Lakeshore mega vaccination hub sa Taguig City at kahapon sa Solaire vaccination hub sa Parañaque City ang mga medical experts mula sa Israel Ministry of Health. Sila ay naririto para mag-observe ang magbahagi ng kanilang insights kung paano pa natin mapapaganda ang ating COVID-19 response, mitigation at vaccination strategies. Tignan po natin ang ilang mga larawan: Itong larawan pong ito ay kahapon sa Solaire 'no. Ang kanilang feedback po, naku, pinakamagandang vaccination site ang nakita nila sa Solaire. Tapos ang mga susunod na larawan po, sa Solaire pa rin po iyan, ito po iyong area ng kanilang registration at ito naman po iyong press conference na ginawa ng ating mga Israeli na mga kaibigan kanina po sa Taguig.

COVID-19 updates naman po tayo. Ito ang ranking ng Pilipinas sa mundo ayon sa Johns Hopkins:

Number 24 pa rin po tayo sa pagdating sa total cases.

Naku, mabuting balita po ito: Naging Number 28 na lamang tayo sa active cases bumaba po ang active cases kaya tumaas ang ranking natin.

Number 131 po tayo sa cases per 100,000 population

Number 90 po tayo sa case fatality rate na 1.7%.

Mayroon tayong 4,353 na mga bagong kaso ayon sa June 23, 2021 datos ng DOH. Salamat sa ating medical frontliners dahil lalo pang tumataas ang ating recovery rate. Ito ay nasa 94.6%. Nasa 1,298,442 na ang bilang ng mga naka-recover. Samantalang malungkot naming binabalita na nasa 23,928 ang binawian ng buhay. Nakikiramay po kami sa mga naulila. Nasa 1.74% ang ating fatality rate.

Puntahan naman po natin ang kalagayan ng ating mga ospital. Puno na ba ho ang ating mga ospital? Well, sa NCR po:

- Ang ating ginagamit na ICU beds ay 44% lamang;
- Ang ginagamit nating isolation beds ay 39% lamang;
- Ang ward beds ay 33% lamang;
- At ang ventilators ay 29% lamang.

Sa buong Pilipinas:

- Ang ating ginagamit na ICU beds ay 57% lamang;
- Ang isolation beds ay 47% lamang;
- Ang ward beds ay 44% lamang;
- At ang nagagamit na ventilators ay 36% lamang.

Now, makakasama naman natin pong muli si Dr. Fr. Nic Austriaco. Sir, actually, talagang kayo lang po ang nagbigay sa akin ng eksplanasyon at sa buong Pilipinas kung bakit importante iyong tinatawag ninyong containment at saka population protection. Ngayong mayroon pong mga ilang lugar na nagsu-surge na pinangakuan na rin natin na mabibigyan ng prayoridad at mas maraming bakuna pursuant doon sa sinasabi nating NCR Plus 8, Plus 10, eh pakisabi po ‘no, unang-una ‘no, tama ba ho na patuloy pa rin nating bibigyan ng prayoridad ang Metro Manila Plus 8?

At pangalawa, bagama’t talagang kasama naman po sa istrategiya ang pagbibigay nang mas maraming bakuna sa mga areas na nagsu-surge, ano po ang payo ninyo doon sa mga siyudad at probinsiya na nagkakaroon ng surge sa mga nakalipas na araw. Dr/Fr. Nicanor Austriaco, the floor is yours.

FR. AUSTRIACO: Thank you. Good afternoon, Sec. Harry.

So what I will do—thank you again for the kind invitation to return to the Malacañang Press briefing. So when I prepared this press briefing yesterday, it was the NCR Plus 8, Plus 8. I’ve been talking about the NCR Plus 8, Plus 8 for the last week, and I am grateful to see that the Philippines has adapted an NCR Plus 8, Plus 10. And let me explain, so what I would like to do today is to speak about the long-term vaccination strategy for our country. And I would like to consider the predictions that some experts have made that the country will reach herd immunity in 2023. And I want to ask, is this something we should really be worried about?

Now, I am going to review some of the material I presented last week. So we have to understand the virus’ attack strategies. So if we’re going to protect ourselves, we have to know the enemy. How does the enemy attack the Philippines? And so this is the pandemic curve for our country.

And as you've noticed—you may have not noticed by in the surge in August last year, there are actually two peaks – one for the NCR and then immediately after, there's the provinces. You see the same thing now, so you see the NCR again, and we have the provinces.

And what I pointed out last week is that the variant will spread around the country like ink in the glass of water. But they always enter the country in the NCR, and we see this now happening three times. With each new variant, we see the same pattern.

So in terms of our exit strategy, the first is we must protect the Filipino people from new variant of COVID-19 especially the Delta and the Delta Plus. And I was so grateful to hear yesterday that the Province of Cebu has decided to also embrace the 10-day hotel quarantine which the data shows is 99.7% effective.

Now, for the exit strategy principle number two is we must build a COVID-proof wall around the NCR. And so this is the pattern, it starts at the NCR and moves to the provinces. So, we vaccinate the NCR, we prevent the virus from travelling to the provinces and this is especially important now because we are building a wall around the Philippine by vaccinating the NCR+8.

And so, there were different exit strategies at first and the government of course chose NCR+8 and what I would like to emphasize is that the NCR+8 strategy does not mean excluding the rest of the country. So, it means prioritizing the NCR+8 but there are still ongoing vaccinations to vaccinate the most at risk in the rest of the country and the distribution now from what I can get from the data is about 65% to the NCR+8 and 35% to the rest of the country.

So, we talked before about containment and herd immunity. So, containment is 40-50% of the population and herd immunity – 70% to 80%. And containment will protect us against future surges, it will allow further reopening and it will allow 'no mask' gathering of vaccinated persons and I pointed out that outbreaks will still occur but they will not spread rapidly. So, the surge potential of the pandemic will be severely diminished.

And the experience of Israel is that if you get the daily attack rate below 1 in 100,000, then you can begin to remove the mask and this would mean about 100 new cases per day in the NCR and as of last week we are currently around 700 or 800 new cases per day.

Now, herd immunity is the highest level of protection, it protects the unvaccinated from the virus, to starve the virus and basically end the pandemic. And as I keep pointing out, we have to build herd immunity in every single level of our society. So, herd immune families, herd immune businesses, the barangays and municipalities.

So, how long will it take? A quarter of a million doses per day sometime in September or October, now have been a guest at the daily briefing this past week for the National Vaccination Operation Center and I have to say, someone who is not a member of the government, I've been incredibly impressed with the professionalism and the efficiency of the operation that is being undertaken right now to vaccinate the country and I congratulate Secretary Vince Dizon for his handling of the rollout.

And based on the numbers, some of which were described by Spox Harry earlier in this briefing, it is really attainable at this time that we will reach containment if not herd immunity in the NCR+8 by Christmas and this is something that we do together. And if we attain containment then we can relax minimum health standards. If we do herd immunity, this is where no mask, no social distancing, no crowds, no limits, no testing, no quarantine.

And here it's important to understand, once you obtain herd immunity in the NCR+8 then travelers entering and leaving the NCR do not need to be tested or quarantined. In the same way, today, we do not test or quarantine people from measles because we already have herd immunity for measles in Manila, in the entire country. And I pointed out last week that we should encourage our kababayans to imagine a 'no mask' Christmas'.

But here is the question: What happens after Christmas? And this is where if you notice I talked about the NCR+8+8 * because the star indicated that the second number was flexible and as you heard from Spox Harry, it's going to be NCR+8+10 and this is the exit strategy, you have to repeat the focused [unclear] vaccinations to build containment.

And so the idea here is we go to the next step. We will vaccinate the hottest provincial areas and you see, well I prepare this last night, I imagine it's NCR+8+8, could have been NCR+8+10 or +12 and it depends on the available vaccine supply in the national government's stockpile. And so, this will be the hottest areas.

Now, it does not mean again towards excluding the rest of the country because there will be parallel vaccinations outside the NCR+8+10 again to cover those most at risk. And so the target date for the NCR+8 is Christmas and the NCR+8+10 in this case would be Easter of 2022 depending upon which exact, which of these areas are included in the +10.

Now, what about the rest of the country? So, a lot of people are saying what about the rest of the country? It's important to understand that there's something unique about the Philippines and it's not our urban and rural populations are about 50 to 50% each. So, there are 50% - 55 million urban Filipinos and 57 million rural Filipinos.

And this is the thing, with the NCR+8+10 exit strategy Filipinos living in our rural areas would be at low risk for COVID-19 even if they're not vaccinated. And this is important to see the strategy of this approach because vaccinating the cities would protect our rural kababayans from the virus. Why is that? Because the virus will pass through the cities to enter the rural provinces.

They cannot travel from India to a very remote part of the Philippines. They must pass through the NCR and then from the NCR to one of the urban areas in our province and then from there to the rural areas. So, if you build a COVID-proof wall around the cities, it is actually a wall around our entire country.

And I think this is so important to emphasize that to focus on the urban areas, to focus first in the NCR+8 then the NCR+8+10 is to build a wall around the entire country because it will allow even our non-vaccinated kababayans to live safely because they are protected by those who live in the cities who are themselves vaccinated.

And so in effect, our immediate goal today as a country is cities-wide herd immunity, it's not the country-wide herd immunity but the cities-wide. So, when people will ask what is the percentage of Filipinos that need to be vaccinated, yes, as the UK experts pointed out, we are a 112 or so million people and 70 to 80% of those have to be vaccinated but you can see we will go far in vaccinating a herd immune—we can build herd immunity in the 55 million Filipinos who live in our cities, that will go far in protecting the rest of the country.

And so the rural Philippines we'll have a low surge risk, we can manage that while everyone is getting vaccinated. So, we will not stop at the NCR+8+10, we'll of course continue to vaccinate but there will be very low surge risk because there will be no virus coming from Manila or coming from Zamboanga to infect someone who is living in the rural parts of Mindanao.

And if the ADAR for these regions is less than one in a hundred thousand, we can even consider relaxing minimum health standards because they are already protected from the rest of the country. So, you notice even with our country-wide herd immunity or country-wide herd immunity is probably 2023 but even without that many regions in our beloved country will return to the old normal hopefully by the middle of next year.

Again, there is a big question mark here because this is all contingent on us preventing the Delta or the Delta Plus variant from entering the country. This must be the primary goal of everyone in the country right now, is to prevent the entry of that. And this is our hope and our prayer, let us do it together.

Thank you so much.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes. Bago po tayo magpatuloy, iyong ating +10 po refer to cities 'no. So, I repeat po, ang atin pong +10 ngayon ay Bacolod City, Iloilo City, Cagayan de Oro City, Baguio City, Zamboanga City, Dumaguete City, Tuguegarao, General Santos City, Naga City and Legazpi City. Lahat po iyan ay mga siyudad.

Okay! So, maraming salamat, Father. As usual napaka-educational ng inyong presentation at napakadali pong maintindihan ano. So, iyan po iyong sagot doon sa istrategiya na ginagawa natin. Hindi po natin sinasabi na less important iyong mga ibang lugar kaya lang importante po talaga para makamit ang containment sa buong Pilipinas na ma-contain natin kung saan talaga matataas ang kaso ng COVID to begin with.

Pero kagaya ng sinabi ko kanina, ang ating polisiya ngayon po is to give priority not just Metro Manila, not only the eight original areas, ngayon po mayroon na tayong +10 – ten cities na nakaka-experience po ng mga surges including Iloilo City.

Okay! Punta na po tayo sa ating open forum. Usec. Rocky, go head please.

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

Question from Cresilyn Catarong of SMNI News: Hiniling po ni Cagayan De Oro 2nd District Representative Rufus Rodriguez sa pamahalaang nasyonal na magpadala nang higit na 20

ventilators sa CDO sa gitna ng patuloy na pagdami ng mga pasyente sa mga ospital kasabay nang pagtaas ng kaso ng COVID-19. Ano ang tugon dito ng Palasyo? At anu-anong tulong ang ipagkakaloob ng national government sa Cagayan de Oro at iba pang parte ng bansa na may matataas na kaso?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, dalawang specific tulong na po ‘no na included na po ang Cagayan De Oro sa Plus 10 so they will be given more vaccines. Tapos po iyong hinihinging ventilators, wala naman pong problema iyan dahil mababa ang actual usage natin ng mga respirators. So kukunin lang natin iyong mga respirators na ngayon po ay hindi ginagamit sa ilang mga lugar to augment iyong pangangailangan ng mga lugar na mayroong surges ‘no.

USEC. IGNACIO: Secretary, question from Kris Jose of Remate/Remate Online: Reaksiyon daw po sa panawagan ng MMDA na dapat manatili pa ring prayoridad ang Kalakhang Maynila sa bakuna laban sa COVID-19 dahil ito ang pinakamadaling magkaroon ng hawahan ng Delta variant, bukod pa sa ang Metro Manila ang sentro ng komersiyo, negosyo at pangunahing port of entry.

SEC. ROQUE: We agree po with the MMDA Chair at saka iyong siyensya na pinakita sa atin ni Doc kanina, iyan po ang dahilan kung bakit—para ma-contain po iyong pagkalat sa buong Pilipinas dahil sentro nga po ang Metro Manila hindi lang po ng transportasyon kung hindi na rin ng kalakalan at saka iyong movement ng tao, eh importante po na ma-contain muna dito sa Metro Manila kung saan naging pinakamataas talaga naman po ang numero ng coronavirus.

USEC. IGNACIO: Second question niya: Ano daw po ang masasabi ng Malacañang sa pahayag ng ilang senador na hindi nila masisisi ang ilang Pilipino na maghaka-haka na malaking raket lang o negosyo ang face shield matapos na ipag-utos ni Pangulong Duterte ang mandatory na pagsusuot ng face shield?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala po akong alam doon sa raket na tinatawag. Pero alam ninyo po eh talagang naintindihan ko naman po talaga na napakahirap nitong face shield. Ako po nakasalaman, ‘pag ako naka-face shield siguradong nagpa-fog po ‘yan; napakahirap, mahirap lalo na doon sa mga nagsasalaman at saka extra cost ‘no.

Pero kinakailangan po paniwalaan natin ang sinasabi ng siyensya at isa po doon sa study na na-publish po sa Lancet – ito po iyong leading medical journal sa buong daigdig at hindi lang sa Pilipinas – eh talagang sinasabi na ang pagsusuot po ng face shield ay nakakatulong ‘no na ibaba ang pagbaba ng COVID infection.

Ang sabi po ng Lancet ha, ito na po iyong pinakaprestihiyoso at pinakakinikilalang authoritative journal, medical journal sa buong mundo ‘no. Sabi nila, ang pagsusuot ng face shield 78% protection in infections tapos kapag sinamahan pa ng use of mask, it results in 85% protection at tapos kapag mayroon pang 1 meter distancing, a risk reduction of 80%. Tapos kung with every additional 1 meter of separation, more than doubling the relative protection.

So iyan po ang sinasabi ng siyensya, iyan po ang sinasabi ng mga dalubhasa. Napakahirap naman pong balewalain na ang sinasabi ng mga nangungunang mga dalubhasa sa larangan po ng medisina at epidemiology.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Ang third question niya: Patuloy daw po iyong pagkuwestiyon ng ilang senador sa polisiya ng pamahalaan na minamandato ang pagsusuot ng face shield. Para sa ilang senador, dapat daw po kilalanin ng DOH ang mga pag-aaral partikular na iyong ‘to wear or not to wear’, optional lamang ang paggamit ng face shields. At may mga bansa naman daw pong nagpapatupad ng either/or policy, face shield lang ang isusuot o face mask.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, gaya ng aking sinabi po ‘no, nakabase po sa siyensya ‘yan. Bagama’t uulitin ko po, naintindihan namin, napaka-inconvenient na magsuot pa ng face shield in addition to face mask. Pero bukod po sa Lancet eh mayroon din tayong pag-aaral na pinagsama-sama po at pinagtugma-tugma dito sa Pilipinas na talagang nagpapakita po na ang pagsusuot ng face shield—ito nga po, 78% reduction; kung sasamahan ng N95 mask, 96%; kapag sasamahan ng 3-meter distancing, 96%; 2-meter distancing, 91%; at 1-meter distancing, 82% reduction. So ang sumatotal with face shield, face mask and distancing, 97% po talaga ang proteksiyon na ibinibigay.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Oo. Punta na tayo kay Pia Rañada, please.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Yes, sir. Sir, just on the passing of former President Benigno Aquino III. Sir, is Malacañang offering to hold a state funeral for the former President?

SEC. ROQUE: I have no information on that po ‘no. I read the official statement of the President and again our continuing condolences to the family of the former President Aquino.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Any plan, sir, of the President to face the nation within the day about this and maybe declare days of mourning? Because this is what GMA did for example when Cory Aquino died in 2009.

SEC. ROQUE: I have no information, although I will be seeing the President this afternoon for several affairs in the Palace. So, I will check.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Okay. Can you share how the President reacted? Were you able to get his personal reaction, his words upon hearing the news of his death?

SEC. ROQUE: Not yet po because I was attending an event in Taguig ‘no, the press conference of the Israeli visiting delegation when news broke out of this demise of the former President. But I’ll be seeing him this afternoon for at least 5 events.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Right. Sir, I hear that later the President will be meeting with lawmakers on Bayanihan 2. May we know if he called this meeting? What are his concerns and what position he’ll be bringing into the meeting?

SEC. ROQUE: I can only confirm that there will be a meeting today to discuss both Bayanihan 2 and Bayanihan 3 ‘no with the leading members of both Houses of Congress ‘no. This will occur after the ceremonial signing of several bills again ‘no and—I know they will be discussing Bayanihan 2 and 3 but beyond that, I have no further information.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: Okay. And last question, sir. Next week we will be marking the anniversary of the President’s oath taking, June 30, and this will also mark the start of his last year in power. So, may we know what will be the President’s priorities be in his last year in power?

SEC. ROQUE: It hasn’t changed; it is still ensuring that every Filipino is vaccinated and his continuing campaign against corruption and prohibited drugs.

PIA RAÑADA/RAPPLER: All right. Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you very much, Pia. Usec. Rocky, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Secretary, question from Kris Jose of Remate for Secretary Roque and kay **FR. AUSTRIACO:** Maari bang iba ang bakuna na kunin sa first dose at iba naman sa second dose? Halimbawa, ang first dose ay Sinovac habang ang second dose naman ay Pfizer. Pupuwede ba iyon? Ano ang side effects ng pagbabakuna na magkaibang brand?

SEC. ROQUE: Pinag-aaralan pa po iyan ‘no; wala pa pong konklusyon ang mga dalubhasa. Specifically, dahil ang tanong mo is from inactivated to MRNI ‘no, so pinag-aaralan po iyan pero may—well I’m not a dalubhasa. Perhaps si Father can share his views being a molecular biologist. Iyong different platform, Doc.

FR. AUSTRIACO: So, thank you very much. Yes. So, there are ongoing clinical trials throughout the world, there are mixing and matching – both inactivated virus with MRNA vaccines or vice versa or adenovirus and MRNA vaccines. The initial data from the United Kingdom shows that when you mix and match two doses, the side effects are actually more challenging after the second dose than if the both doses are the same—from the same brand.

We are waiting the data for the immune response of the mixed dosing strategy. It’s expected to be published in the next two or three weeks. At that point, we will be able to tell whether or not there is a change in the efficacy of the vaccine strategy depending if you mix or match. And at that point, the FDA of the Philippines will have to decide how we will, if we will change anything.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Father. Question from Leila Salaverria of Inquirer, Secretary Roque: Does Malacañang have any directive to authorities regarding the reported cyber-attacks of red-tagged news sites, the DICT and the Army have been linked to the cyber-attacks? What does the Palace think of this of this cyber-attack? Is this supported by government policy?

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t know why concluded it is being linked to government, because DICT’s mandate in fact is to assist in the implementation of the cybercrimes act together with law

enforcement agencies – the Cybercrime Division of the NBI and the Philippine National Police. So, it is a crime po, to launch a cyber-attack pursuant to the cybercrimes act. It will be investigated and I will reiterate that it is unfair to link government offices to these cyber-attacks. Pending investigation.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, punta naman tayo kay Mela Lesmoras please.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Hi, good afternoon, Secretary Roque at sa ating panauhin po, si Reverend Father Austriaco. Sir, just a follow up question po sa question nga ni Pia Rañada. Okay lang po bang pakipaliwanag sa ating mga kababayan, gaano ba kahalaga iyong state funeral? And I know it's early to tell pa, pero sa tingin po ba ninyo, may tiyansang mabigyang mailibing din sa Libingan ng mga Bayani si dating Pangulong Aquino?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, of course kung gusto po ng pamilya na mailibing sa Libingan ng mga Bayani, talaga naman pong pupuwedeng mailibing doon ang ating mga dating Presidente. But that is the choice of the family. As far as iyong iba mo pang tanong, sabi ko nga po, I was almost late for this press briefing because I spend the whole morning in Taguig and I have only had a conversation with Executive Secretary Medialdea on the official statement which I just read.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Opo. And, sir, sa gitna nga rin po ng sitwasyon, hindi rin maiiwasan iyong pagtuloy din na bashing at politics na nasasabay nga sa kasalukuyang pangyayari. May I just ask, ano po iyong mensahe ng Malacañang sa publiko, sa gitna nga ngayong nagluluksa pa rin ang Pamilyang Aquino? Ano po ang mensahe ng Malacañang sa patuloy pa rin, lalo na sa social media, sa isyu po ng bashing at pulitika po?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, alam po ninyo tayong mga Pilipino mayroon tayong kaugalian, at isa sa talagang kaugalian natin ay nakikiramay kapag mayroon pong namatayan sa pamilya. So, igalang po natin itong kaugalian natin dahil alam naman po ninyo nangyayari iyan sa lahat ng mga Pilipino at alam natin kung gaano kasakit ang mga pangyayaring ito.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Opo. And panghuli na lamang po, Secretary Roque. Regarding nga sa schedule ni Pangulong Duterte, aasahan din po natin na magkakaroon muli siya ng isang talumpati mamaya, bukod sa pulong nga sa lawmakers?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, alam naman po ninyo, kapag mayroong mga public events, kagaya ng signing of laws, reenactment of the signing of the laws, eh mayroon din siyang talumpati at iyan naman po will be carried live by PTV 4 and RTVM.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Thank you so much po, Secretary Roque at kay Father Austriaco po.

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

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, Secretary. Mayroon lang po clarification si Leila Salaverria about dito sa unang tanong niya. Hindi po DICT, [but] DOST and the Army have been linked to the cyber-attacks.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I think, it is still unfair to link any government agency dahil hindi pa naman po naiimbestigahan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo, based daw po iyan sa report ng Qurium Media Foundation, a Swedish digital forensic group.

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko po alam kung ano iyong grupo na iyon at hindi ko po alam kung talagang competent siyang magbigay ng testimonya dito sa ating bansa.

USEC. IGNACIO: Question from Cresilyn Catarong of SMNI News: Can you confirm iyong pagpupulong ngayong araw sa Malacañang ilang miyembro ng Kamara at Senado kasama si Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte patungkol daw po sa Bayanihan Law? If mayroon maliban dito, anu-anong mga agenda ang posibleng tatalakayin sa naturang pulong?

SEC. ROQUE: Mayroon po kasing reenactment of the signing of some of the bills that have become law. So, after that po iyong pagpupulong and the agenda as confirmed to me by our PLLO, Secretary Baby Pascual includes Bayanihan 2 extension and Bayanihan 3.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Question from Jopel Pelenio of DWIZ: Kung ilalagay daw po sa half-mast iyong flag sa Palace?

SEC. ROQUE: As I said po, everything I will know after this press briefing. Because I arrived here po just at the nick of time to hold this press briefing. But I will give further details po.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Question ni Maricel Halili ng TV 5: Iyong una po niyang tanong tungkol po doon sa pag-visit sana daw ni Presidente or kung natawagan daw po si former President. Pero iyong follow up po niya: What do you think is the greatest legacy of PNoy? What do you want to tell the family of the late President?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, iyon nga po, nakikiramay po kami. At ang achievement po niya ay, unang-una, nanungkulan po siya sa isang demokrasya at siyempre po maalala din natin iyong kaniyang order na walang wang-wang at maalala natin siya bilang isang simpleng public servant na hinalal po ng taumbayan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat po. Ivan Mayrina, please.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Good afternoon, Secretary and Father Nick. Doctor-Father, my first question is for you, sir. Sec, if I may?

SEC. ROQUE: Go ahead please.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Yeah. Doc. Austriaco, sir, you said that the scenario of celebrating a Christmas without mask is contingent on us preventing the entry of the Delta variant into the country. In your opinion, are we doing enough to make that happen? And yes, we are now tightening our borders, we are implementing strict quarantine protocols, but in terms of the other aspects of our COVID response like for example testing or treatment facilities and all the other aspects of our response, are we doing enough? And what should the government be doing now should a surge caused by the delta variant happens?

FATHER AUSTRIACO: So, thank you for that question. The government has successfully stop 17 cases of the Delta variant from entering community transmission in the Philippines and I am grateful for that achievement. At this time, what we are learning about Delta variant is that it has combined the worst characteristics of the variants that have come before it. The entry of the Delta variant in debut into the Philippines would be dramatic. What you would see is that, based on the numbers that we are seeing around the world, the number of infections of one COVID patient with the Delta variant rises from 2 to 3 which was the original variant from Wuhan to about 6 to 8.

So, what would happened if the delta variant entered our beloved country? The contact tracing capacity would have to be severely enhanced to undertake the contact tracing for that kind of transmission. We also know from the United Kingdom that hospitalization rates increased by 30%. If the delta variant enters the country, this would put significant strain on our healthcare system. We already saw what happened with the alpha variant in March. So, I would hope that the national government is preparing for the worst right. So, we hope for the best, we have very strong border controls, but would hope that the government is also preparing for the worst-case scenario and to do what would we do if we detect the delta variant in the NCR in the months ahead.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Thank you, Dr. Austriaco. Secretary Roque, sir, may we have your reaction: Kasi po kahapon, for example, si Governor Bichara ng Albay, problema pa rin po ng lalawigan niya iyong testing. Tapos iyong mga isolation facilities, inaayawan daw po ng mga nagpa-positive dahil hindi kagandahan. How are we in terms of preparing for the worst na binabanggit po ni Father Austriaco?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, kahapon po ay binisita po natin, kasama ng mga Israeli experts, iyong 380 bed hospital capacity na modular na ginawa po in 52 days diyan po sa Luneta; and we were very impressed. The Israelis, in fact, were very impressed dahil it is state of the art. It does cost too much, it cost 200 million pesos and it is state of the art. At ang naging conclusion nga ng mga Israelis at pati ng mga nagpunta roon ay this is a way to prepare po for the worst with the Delta variant and the Delta plus variants, mas marami talagang mga ospital para pangalagaan iyong mga moderate hanggang serious and critical.

Ang plano nga po ng Siyudad ng Maynila ay dahil mayroon na silang 300—hindi ko po maalala kung 340 or 380, but 300 plus bed capacity for at least moderate cases is to declog iyong mga ospital na pinatatakbo ng Siyudad ng Maynila ‘no of the mild, asymptomatic and moderate cases so they can concentrate on ICU.

Now, this is actually the strategy on nationwide basis ‘no. Number one talaga, paigtingin iyong ating healthcare capacity sa pamamagitan ng additional beds lalong-lalo na ng additional ICU beds. And that has been a personal advocacy of mine to see na madagdagan pa nang mas marami pa ang ating mga ICU beds. Bagama’t halos—ano ba ang figure natin? Dati 700 lang ang ating ICU bed, ngayon ang ginagamit nang datos na ng DOH is 1,200 ‘no. So almost nadoble na po natin iyong ating ICU bed capacity dito po sa Metro Manila.

At siyempre po, patuloy pa rin iyong ating integration ng ating StaySafe app. Totoo po, kinakailangan talagang paigtingin ang ating contact tracing dahil iyon po iyong pinaka-epektibong pamamaraan na maiwasan ang hawahan, ma-isolate iyong mga naging close contact ng nakakahawang sakit na ito. So the process is ongoing. Mayroon na pong partial operation ang ating StaySafe but all local governments are still in the process of integrating their systems with StaySafe.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: So again, all told, Secretary, are we prepared for a possible surge cause by the Delta variant?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, we are doing what are necessary para po paghandaan ang pagpasok nitong mas nakakahawa at mas nakakamatay na Delta variant. Pinapaigting natin ang ating kampaniya na mag-mask, hugas, iwas; pinapalakas natin ang ating contact tracing; pinaparami natin ang ating healthcare capacity. Pero siyempre po sa huli, panawagan na magtulungan tayo, magkaisa dahil ibang klase po itong bagong kalaban natin na Delta at Delta Plus variants.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Dr. Austriaco, Secretary Roque, thank you, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat, Ivan. Balik tayo kay Usec. Rocky.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes, Secretary, from Keith Calayag of Manila Times: Kapansin-pansin na hindi na raw po nagbibigay ng update si Baguio City Mayor Benjie Magalong patungkol sa contact tracing efforts ng gobyerno. Siya pa rin po ba raw ang Contact Czar? Kung hindi, may plano ba ang Presidente na mag-appoint nang papalit kay Mayor Magalong?

SEC. ROQUE: Si Mayor Magalong pa rin po, at ang alam ko po ay patuloy ang kaniyang ginagawang training sa iba’t ibang mga LGUs para sa epektibong contact tracing system.

USEC. IGNACIO: Second question niya: Marami pa ring establishments ang manual pa rin daw po iyong method na gamit sa contact tracing at hindi pa rin gumagamit ng contact tracing apps. Ano po ang ginagawa ng gobyerno para ma-compel ang lahat na gamitin ang StaySafe app?

SEC. ROQUE: Nasagot ko na po iyan. Where in the process of integrating all existing systems with StaySafe.

USEC. IGNACIO: Ano raw po ang plano ng gobyerno para mapaingting pa ang contact tracing sa bansa ngayong nakapasok na ang Delta variant?

SEC. ROQUE: Naghahanda po tayo ng mga contact tracers na additional din ‘no bukod doon sa mayroon na tayo. At iyan nga po siguro ay kabahagi ng pag-uusapan ukol po sa Bayanihan II at Bayanihan III.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Secretary Roque, may request lang po, pasensiya na, iyong Malabon Youth: Since non-contact sports daw po ang classification ng volleyball, kung puwede raw po itong i-allow ng IATF?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, itatanong ko po iyan sa IATF ‘no. Outdoor, non-contact sports is allowed pero hindi ko po alam talaga kung non-contact sports ang volleyball ha kasi ang alam ko may mga pagkakataon na nagkakaroon iyan ng contact.

USEC. IGNACIO: Okay. Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat po. Pia Gutierrez, please.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Hi, sir! Magandang hapon. Sir, doon sa Plus 10 areas, in terms of percentages, how much of our vaccines will be allocated to these areas, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Sa ngayon, hindi ko po alam ‘no kasi dumami po iyan eh – NCR Plus 8, Plus 10. So it will be a higher percentage ‘no. So I will clarify that po because right now, I have no information.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Opo. Kasi you mentioned before, the NCR is 32.2%.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, yes.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Possible po ba, sir, na parang mabago rin iyon re-allocation dito sa NCR Plus 8 to accommodate ito pong pagdadagdag natin ng mga areas na mayroong priority?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman po ‘no kasi talaga itong bagong prioritization is also subject to more supplies. At nakita naman natin sa presentasyon ni Doctor/Father na talagang importante na ma-attain ang containment or population protection sa lalong mabilis na panahon dito sa Metro Manila Plus dahil ito iyong—maganda nga iyong ginamit niyang illustration, parang ink na kumakalat ‘no. Kapag napigil natin iyong pagkalat ng ink sa pinanggagalingan talaga ay mapapababa natin ang numero in the entire country.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Pero, sir, gaano tayo ka-flexible pagdating sa allocation ng vaccines? Like, if we see another area na mayroong mataas din po na cases, possible po na madagdag siya doon sa prioritization or kung isa sa mga areas na ito sa Plus 10 or Plus 8 ay bumababa iyong cases, puwede ba siyang maalis sa prioritization? How does it work, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: It is being reviewed regularly kung anong mga areas na may surge kasi talagang kabahagi iyan ng istrategiya, mas maraming bakuna sa mga lugar na nagsi-surge. So patuloy po ang pagmo-monitor natin sa daily attack rate, sa two-week average attack rate at saka sa healthcare utilization rates ng iba’t ibang mga lugar.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, on another topic. Kasi Filipino Nurses United said that the government should set aside iyong unobligated funds from Bayanihan II to pay for their benefits and their compensation, iyon nga po sa healthcare workers. So, what does the Palace have to say this at lalo na po ngayon na pag-uusapan na mamaya ni President Duterte with the leaders ng House and Senate iyong Bayanihan II? Is this something that would be accommodated itong request nila?

SEC. ROQUE: That's in fact possible. It is not improbable dahil ang naging posisyon po ng Executive Secretary is we will source funding to pay for the prospective salary adjustment pursuant to the Paquiz decision. At posible po na magkaroon ng supplemental funding sa pamamagitan po ng Bayanihan III o 'di naman kaya, further realignment of the funds intended for Bayanihan II for this purpose. So anything is possible po because Congress has plenary powers of legislation.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Okay, sir. Sir, last question na lang po. Has the President taken his second dose po of the vaccine?

SEC. ROQUE: Lagi kong nakakalimutan tanungin. Mamaya isusulat ko na talaga iyan: Tanungin ang second dose. Kasi kapag nagkikita kami, ang dami naming pinag-uusapan. Nagagalit na nga sa akin iyong mga kasama ko kapag nagpupunta kami ng Davao dahil umaalis na kami ng Davao nang midnight na halos because sa dami ng mga tanong. So, mamaya talaga I will put a note to myself: Second dose. Okay?

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: All right, sir. Thank you po.

SEC. ROQUE: Maraming salamat po. Yes, Usec. Rocky? Thank you, Pia. Usec. Rocky again, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. From Tina Mendez ng Philippine Star: May reports daw po that flyers are being distributed saying that vaccines being administered in certain areas are fake. Some people decided not to pursue their vaccination at SM MOA in Pasay City today after getting the flyers. What is the government doing about this disinformation? Will the government allow this to continue? Further fueling distress and hesitancy on vaccine versus COVID-19?

SEC. ROQUE: Kalokohan po iyan. Lahat po ng bakuna ligtas at epektibo. At iyong mga nagpapakalat po ng ganiyang mga fake news, titingnan po natin kung anong pupuwedeng gawin nila dahil tandaan ninyo po we are in a state of public emergency.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Secretary.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay, maraming salamat. Punta naman tayo kay Melo Acuña, please.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary! Para po sa inyo, nabanggit po ni Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua kahapon sa 42nd National Conference of Employers na mayroon nang in place na recovery programs at kailangan na lamang maipatupad

ito upang makaangat ang ekonomiya. Would you be more specific as to the strategy of the government to make these recovery programs work as the soonest possible time?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman po nagbabago iyan ano, iyong provision ng fiscal and monetary support to the tune of trillions, iyong pagpapalawak po ng ating vaccination program at saka siyempre iyong pagpapaigting po ng ating minimum health protocols at iyong ating tinatawag na Prevention, Isolation, Detection and Treatment protocols dahil kinakailangan ma-control ang virus, mapababa ang numero, maipagpatuloy ang bakuna nang maiwasan ang pagkakasakit at kapag nagawa po natin ito eh mas magbubukas ang ekonomiya na magiresulta sa mas malagong ekonomiya.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Mayroon na po bang statement ang Malacañang sa pagkasawi ng tatlong piloto at tatlong crew ng bumagsak na Blackhawk samantalang mayroong proficiency flight kagabi sa Gitnang Luzon?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala pa po akong balita diyan but I will verify and come up with a statement in the afternoon after verification po.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Thank you very much. Para po kay Fr. Nick Austriaco. Magandang hapon po, Fr. Nick! Nice to see you again. May isa lamang po akong tanong sapagkat kahapon nabanggit doon sa National Conference of Employers na isang safety risk ang paggamit ng face shield sa loob ng manufacturing plants. May I have your idea kung makakasama bang magkaroon pa ng face shield sa loob ng mga pabrika na mayroong manual na ginagawa iyong ating mga manggagawa?

FR. AUSTRIACO: So, as Secretary Harry pointed out, there are scientific evidences that supports the use of face shields, eye protection actually, to decrease transmission of the virus. For very particular situations, you have to have a risk-benefit analysis.

So, you have to decide you know if the risk and the benefit, which one works out and then the IATF has the responsibility of discerning and deciding what those relative risk and benefits are for particular workplace especially for example in a workplace where you need other face protection for something else.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: I see. But will this not in a way affect the productivity of our workers in the manufacturing sector?

FR. AUSTRIACO: Well, again, I'm not sure. To answer your question will depend on the particular sector, the particular factory that's involved because there could be adjustments made to the manufacturing and production line that compensates for the use of face shields.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Thank you very much, Father! Thank you very much, Secretary Harry!

SEC. ROQUE: Thank you, Melo. Back to Usec. Rocky, please.

USEC. IGNACIO: Secretary, iyon na po ang lahat na nakuha nating questions ngayong araw.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. Maraming salamat kay Father Austriaco. Sir, huwag kayong magsasawa sa aming mga imbitasyon pero maraming-maraming salamat po. Maraming salamat kay Usec. Rocky at maraming salamat sa ating kasama sa Malacañang Press Corps.

Sa ngalan po ng inyong Presidente Rodrigo Roa Duterte, ito po ang inyong Spox Harry Roque nagsasabing: Nakikiramay po kaming muli sa Pamilyang Aquino, at maraming salamat sa serbisyo ninyo po, Mr. President Noynoy Aquino.

Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat. ##

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