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# PH buys 40-m Pfizer doses

*Galvez: Single biggest deal so far; vaccine slated for August delivery*

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**T**HE government has made the biggest vaccine procurement for 2021 with the signing of a supply agreement for 40 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, with deliveries expected to start in August.

"We are very happy to report that the government and the management of Pfizer have finally concluded our negotiations," said vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. "(Health) Secretary (Francisco)

Duque and I signed yesterday (Saturday) the supply agreement for the biggest and most decisive deal we had for 2021."

"The vaccine demand has begun to ease up for many big and rich countries, as most of them have already acquired more than enough vaccines for their population and have vaccinated many of their citizens. This has allowed the manufacturer to commit to us that deliveries, though still to be made in tranches, will be in bulk," he said.

The procurement of the 40 million vaccine doses will be financed through a multilateral loan with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Galvez said loan funds from multilateral partners such as the ADB follow a direct disbursement scheme in which payments are made directly by the fund manager to the vaccine manufacturer.

He said this would ensure that vaccine

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procurement is transparent and free of corruption, as the funds will not pass through any government official or agency.

With the latest supply agreement, the Philippines has now secured the delivery of 113 million doses from five manufacturers namely, Sinovac with 26 million doses, Sputnik V with 10 million doses, Moderna with 20 million doses, AstraZeneca with 17 million doses, and Pfizer, with 40 million doses.

The COVAX Facility under the World Health Organization has also committed to deliver a total of 44 million doses this year, bringing the total number of doses secured by the Philippines to 157 million.

Meanwhile, about 16 million doses from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson are still under negotiation.

The Philippines last week started its programme to vaccinate 35 million people working outside their homes, while continuing to inoculate priority sectors such as healthcare workers and elderly citizens, hoping to achieve herd immunity this year.

More than 8 million doses have been administered, of which about 6 million were for the first dose, suggesting a slow vaccine rollout that puts the government's target to vaccinate up to 70 million people this year in doubt.

Vaccine supply around the capital Manila remains limited, while COVID-19 cases in several provinces have surged, complicating efforts to ramp up the immunization drive in a country with some of Asia's largest numbers of infections and deaths.

"The vaccines from Pfizer will significantly boost our national immunization program and will enable us to realize our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end. This is another positive development that will give a happy and better Christmas for all Filipinos," Galvez said.

Galvez reiterated that preparedness on the part of local government units (LGUs) is imperative with the confirmed procured supply from Pfizer.

"We don't want any vaccine to be wasted because of spoilage and mishandling," Galvez said.

Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines have storage temperature requirements of minus 80 to minus 60 degrees centigrade while Moderna and Sputnik require minus 20.

Galvez said the government will deploy the procured Pfizer doses to all provinces and regions.

"We intend to deploy the Pfizer, Sput-

nik V, and Moderna vaccines as soon as possible and distribute it even to rural areas and communities. However, this will not be possible if the receiving LGU is not ready to handle these types of vaccines," said Galvez.

He said the scheduled delivery of Pfizer and Moderna will coincide with the opening of the national immunization program to the general population, including those under the 12-to-15 age bracket.

However, the National Task Force against COVID-19 clarified that the adult population and the vulnerable sector will still be given priority in the vaccination program.

Galvez said the vaccination of 12-to-15-year-olds may be conducted in the latter part of the year, as the country increases its vaccine inventory and completes the inoculation of the priority sectors.

The Philippines logged 5,803 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday, bringing the total number of infections to 1,359,015, as two laboratories were unable to submit their data on time, the Department of Health (DOH) reported.

The DOH reported 84 new fatalities, bringing the death toll from COVID-19 to 23,621.

The DOH also reported 7,652 newly recovered persons, bringing the total recoveries to 1,277,715.

Active cases stood at 57,679, of which 91.9 percent were mild, 3.7 percent were asymptomatic, 1.3 percent were critical, 1.8 percent were severe, and 1.29 percent were moderate.

Nationwide, 57 percent of ICU beds, 47 percent of isolation beds, 46 percent of ward beds, and 36 percent of ventilators, were in use.

In Metro Manila, 43 percent of ICU beds, 38 percent of isolation beds, 32 percent of ward beds, and 32 percent of ventilators, were in use.

Meanwhile, Senator Panfilo Lacson said the P57.3 billion in loans already secured by the government can cover the P25 billion required to vaccinate minors.

Lacson cited updated figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicating only P30.462 billion may be needed to inoculate 68.2 million adult Filipinos this year.

"Figures from the PSA as of March 28 this year show the Philippines' midyear population will reach 110,198,654 by July 1. Of this, 62 percent or 68.323 million are adults. If we multiply this by P446 per dose, including logistical costs, we will need about P30.472 billion to inoculate adult Filipinos," Lacson said.

The difference of P26.83 billion is





more than enough to cover the P25 billion requirement to procure the vaccines for minors, he said.

Based on these figures, Lacson said, the government need not look for an additional P25 billion since it is amply covered by the excess from its borrowings.

He noted that even if the government were to inoculate 83.8 million adults based on the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF)'s figures, at P446 per dose including logistical requirements, it would only need P37.374 billion -- still way below the P57.3 billion in borrowings.

On the other hand, he pointed out that Galvez had stated that the country will have 68 million free doses of vaccines, including 44 million from the COVAX facility and 24 million from two brands.

"Every peso counts and must be accounted for, especially during these difficult times. That said, the IATF and DOF (Department of Finance) should further clarify the figures that they presented during last Tuesday's Committee of the Whole hearing," Lacson said.

During the Senate Committee of the Whole hearing on the government's vaccination program last June 15, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said that of the P88.6 billion budget to procure vaccines, P57.3 billion had been sourced through concessional loans from multilateral institutions such as the ADB.

Also, during the hearing, Lacson and Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III agreed that with more than enough funds to achieve herd immunity for this year, the government should focus more on ensuring the efficient rollout of the vaccines.

Lacson said the Senate will scrutinize agencies' requests for additional budgets against the pandemic, including an additional P66 billion being requested by the Department of Health for pandemic response.

"First, they will have to account for P660.1 billion which, according to the Department of Budget and Management, has been released to the agencies concerned for the overall COVID-19 response over the last 15 months or so," he said.

"During these times when the country is almost neck-deep in debt with an unprecedented P11 trillion in foreign and domestic borrowings, not to mention an alarmingly low revenue collection, every peso that comes from the treasury should count and made sure to be put to good use, he added.

Lacson also said the government should all the more do a better job of promoting trust in the vaccination process and

maximize limited resources to do so, after Australia's commitment to provide P480.2 million to procure additional COVID-19 vaccine jabs.

Data from the National Vaccination Operations Center (NVOC) showed that as of June 18, a total of 8,050,711 jabs have been administered nationwide.

Of the total, 5,953,810 were given as the first dose.

Galvez said there will be no letup in the national vaccination campaign.

"All sectors of society are working together so that we can start to move on from this pandemic, bring back a greater

sense to our lives, and further open up our economy," he said in a statement.

To date, 94.24 percent or 1,053,373 health care workers (A1) have been inoculated while in the senior citizens (A2) group, 1,939,599 have received their first dose and 536,476 are fully vaccinated.

For adults with comorbidities (A3), 2,005,206 have been given their first jabs while 498,925 have received both shots.

For the economic front-liners (A4), 452,600 were administered their first dose, while 8,127 are already fully vaccinated.

The vaccination of the A4 category began on June 7 but is limited to the National Capital Region (NCR), Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Bulacan, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga, and Rizal where there are a significant number of Covid-19 cases.

At least 23,826 indigent residents were also given their first dose in select LGUs in NCR.

Also on Sunday, Quezon City Rep. Precious Hipolito Castelo said the US donation of COVID-19 shots could boost vaccine confidence among Filipinos, who favor jabs made by Western companies.

But she called on people to "take the vaccine that is available because that is our best protection against COVID-19."

She also urged vigilance, even among those who have been fully vaccinated.

"The latest data from Indonesia shows that even those fully vaccinated can get the virus and be hospitalized. So let us continue to be vigilant, to continue wearing face masks and face shields, to always be on guard against getting infected, or if we are infected, against infecting others," she said.

Over 300 Indonesian health workers got the virus despite taking two doses of the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine, she said.

The Department of Health, however, assured the public that Sinovac remains effective against death and hospitalization from COVID-19.