

Presidential Communications Operations Office
News and Information Bureau

**LAGING HANDA PRESS BRIEFING WITH
PCOO SECRETARY MARTIN ANDANAR,
CABINET SECRETARY KARLO ALEXEI NOGRALES,
AND DOH SECRETARY FRANCISCO DUQUE III**

FEBRUARY 14, 2019 (11:16 A.M. – 12:32 P.M.)

USEC. ROCKY IGNACIO: Good morning media friends, let's now have Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar

SEC. ANDANAR: Thank you so much Usec. Rocky. Good morning to all of our viewers, watching today on television and on social media streaming. Good morning to our members of the Malacañang Press Corps. I apologize for calling you to report today, for calling for this Laging Handa, we may have disrupted your Valentines celebration. But just the same Happy Valentines to you, to all of you. Although a lot of us here are in blue, so it's a blue Valentines for a lot of us here.

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte on Monday, Feb. 10, met the country's local Chief Executives to assure that the national government remains on top of the threat of the Coronavirus and is prepared to handle all public emergencies. COVID-19 is a virus outbreak which originated in China, but we wish to point out that that is something that needs to be resolved by all of us.

For this week alone, the Presidential Communications Operations Office has spearheaded a gathering of different line agencies of the government to collate the best practices of each agency regarding the Novel Coronavirus 2019 or COVID-19 to have a strong and united message, so the public will have right information about this global health scare.

Now, for our members of the Chinese press, the Ambassador, I know that you've been expecting the Ambassador to be here, Ambassador of China to be here in our press conference so he sent his regrets that he couldn't make it to this press conference. But then again, you can just communicate with the Ambassador straight through his public information officer at the Chinese Embassy. As a matter of fact, they were prepared already; they sent their video materials here but unfortunately he couldn't make it.

Having said this, it is my pleasure to welcome our two distinguished guests on Valentine's Day – Health Secretary Francisco Duque and Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles to discuss their respective action/response. Okay, first we shall have Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles. You may have the floor now, sir.

CABSEC. NOGRALES: Thank you very much Secretary Martin Andanar, Secretary Francisco Duque III, Usec. Rocky; to our members of the Malacañang Press Corps, the other members of the media, our foreign correspondents and the general public following this briefing – Happy Valentine's po sa ating lahat, magandang tanghali po.

As you all know, the other day President Rodrigo Duterte went on TV urging our kababayans to remain calm, vigilant and responsible in the face of the growing anxiety felt by everyone because of the COVID-19 virus. The President likewise assured the public that the government is working with the World Health Organization, with medical organizations and other partners in the private sector to address the threats posed by this public health concern.

We recognize that providing the public with timely, accurate and relevant information about the virus and government efforts to contain it are necessary to assuage the fears of our people. In this regard, we would like to thank DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III for joining us this morning to provide updates on the measures they are spearheading to monitor and contain COVID-19 as well as all the other agencies that have provided input for today's briefing such as the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Finance, the Department of Tourism, the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Science and Technology to name a few.

The involvement of various departments is part of our whole-of-government approach to manage the overall impact of the virus and to mitigate its negative effects on areas like our economy. This is why government monitoring efforts are not just focused on the virus per se, but on keeping a close eye on the effects of changes in behaviors as a response to COVID-19; this, in order to be able to mobilize our resources and respond properly, promptly to the needs of our people.

In other words, government is taking a hands-on approach to handling this issue and will be proactive in making the necessary interventions to maintain our current trajectory, particularly with regard to the economy which was recently given a vote of confidence as reflected in the recent Fitch outlook upgrade.

While COVID-19 is expected to impact the global economy, we believe that achieving our 2020 growth target of 6.5% is possible. As the effects are usually short lived and generally affect only the first quarter. Recent history has shown that the Philippine economy is resilient, given its robust domestic demand and production. We are riding on a strong growth momentum with our GDP growth accelerating to 6.4% in the fourth quarter of 2019 from 6.0% in the third quarter.

Last year, notwithstanding external headwinds of heightened global trade wars and geopolitical tensions, the Philippines managed to record a 5.9% GDP growth for the whole of 2019, making it one of the fastest growing economies in Asia. Its vibrant domestic demand is spearheaded by the government's ramp-up infrastructures spending, thanks to the Build, Build, Build Program. The country's merchandise export performance has also been positive, posting an impressive double digit year-on-year growth or +21.4% last December.

On the production side, both industry and services sector were major contributors to the country's economic growth and the country's labor market is becoming healthier with record low unemployment that was 5.1% in 2019 and with 1.3 million new jobs generated last year. Poverty incidence is also at a record low at 16.6% in 2018. In this context, it is likely that the Philippine economy will exhibit a strong recovery from the temporary effects of COVID-19.

There's a consensus that even if the first quarter GDP growth will slow down, mitigating measures, quick responses and low mortality rates will not hurt productivity. Domestic demand is still growing and we have a big domestic economy. We are not as heavily dependent on the rest of the world compared to our other neighboring countries, and this implies that the economic momentum would allow the country to sustain its growth trajectory towards meeting the full year GDP growth target range of 6.5% to 7.5% in the near term and over the medium term.

Concerns have been raised over the impact of COVID-19 on tourism. The DOT estimates 42.9 billion pesos in foregone revenue up to April of this year. This however is still just a fraction compared to the annual inbound tourism revenue which in 2018 was actually 441 billion pesos and from January to November 2019 was 458 billion pesos.

Note that in 2018, the country earned 3.2 trillion pesos in total from domestic expenditure. Therefore there is a lot of opportunity to cushion or even compensate for the economic impact through domestic tourism.

The DOT and the tourism sector with the support from the President will rollout exciting domestic tourism programs that will offer lower prices for airline fares within the country and hotel and resort accommodation across our tourist destinations. We invite everyone to explore the hidden gems in the Philippines and to discover places you've never been to in our country.

If however, our partners in the tourism sector and other sectors continue to be adversely affected, there are available government lending programs offers by Landbank and the Development Bank of the Philippines. LandBank offers the CARES Program (Calamity Rehabilitation Support Program) or calamity support program which includes rehabilitation via loan restructuring and providing loans to SMEs. The basic terms are at six percent fixed rate for the first two years or first five years for long-term loan subject to annual re-pricing thereafter. Allow me to stress, however, that the LandBank is open to lowering the rate if warranted.

The DBP on the other hand has the RESPONSE program (Rehabilitation Support Program on Severe Events), a rehabilitation financing program that is usually used for disease infestations that result in significant social economic damages, but one can also be applied in the current situation. The program provides for more relaxed terms, a reduced equity requirement of up to five percent of project cost, and a reduced margin to one percent.

Another growing concern is the apparent shortage of face masks in the market.

Through the efforts of DTI, our local manufacturer of face masks have committed to supply 1.6 million N88 face masks for the next four weeks to meet the growing demand. This is expected to supply not just the general public needs but also the needs of DOH and the Red Cross as well.

DTI is also encouraging other firms to manufacture face masks and through its board of investments can offer incentives such as four-year income tax holiday and duty free importation of capital equipment.

While we have yet to report a single case of COVID-19 being transmitted to a Filipino within our shores, we are ready to test all potential carriers to prevent local transmission of this disease.

The DOST reports that a local health technology company of Filipino scientists has developed a local diagnostic kit that can test if a patient is positive for COVID-19. Being locally produced, the test kit will cost almost half of what is currently available. With the support of DOST and the DOH, we hope to be able to expedite the validation process with the WHO so that as soon as it is validated, we can make these local test kits available for all hospitals for use under physician's discretion.

The President has emphasized the need for the trust, cooperation and support of all our citizens as we face this challenge. As long as we are vigilant, prepared and united in efforts to combat this disease, we are confident that we will overcome this threat.

Maaasahan ninyo na ang buong makinarya ng gobyerno, sa pangunguna ng Department of Health, ay mabilis na kumikilos upang tugunan ang kasalukuyang sitwasyon. Maraming, maraming salamat po!

SEC. DUQUE: Secretary Martin Andanar of the PCOO; Secretary of the Cabinet, Secretary Karlo Nograles; and our friends from the media and the press corps, in particular, allow me first to greet all of you in behalf of the Department of Health, indeed, Happy Valentine's Day. Likewise, in behalf of the IATFOEID or the Interagency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Disease and in particular, COVID-19, to share with you today the COVID-19 updates.

As of February 14, there are 191 patients under investigation cases currently admitted in various health facilities, while 260 PUIs have been discharged. As of yesterday, 252 PUIs have tested negative for the COVID-19, while 186 have pending test results from RITM.

I wish to reiterate that we do not have any confirmed case of the COVID-19 in the country as of the moment. But I need to mention this time and again, it's perhaps not a question of if but rather a question of when. So that's why we cannot afford to let our guards down despite the fact that we still don't have local transmission, and in fact, all three cases have been clearly established to be imported ones.

Two of those that tested positive were discharged, and the other one expired. While there is no recorded case, again, of local transmission in the country, we can already see this happening in nearby countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, among others.

These develops propel us to gear up for a possible community spread. The Department of Health is at the forefront of assessing the situation and making evidence-based decisions to ensure that we keep the threats of the COVID-19 at bay.

Thank you very much and this is all for the updates.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Good morning sir – Kay CabSec po. Sir, since we have travel ban po, could we reiterate kung ano iyong maaaring maitulong ng gobyerno, kung ano ang maipu-provide sa mga Filipinos for assistance?

SEC. NOGRALES: Yes, for OFWs who are affected by the travel ban, the Department of Labor and its attached agencies have prepared assistance packages for those who are affected. Some of them have actually received the 10,000 pesos assistance from the Department of Labor and Employment.

And we're also preparing ... they are also set to give 'no, assistance such as livelihood assistance kits, and training for those who wish to come up or establish their own livelihood or business here in the Philippines. The alternative also is to re-deploy them elsewhere.

So again, the Department of Labor and Employment, together with its attached agencies, has been looking for other destinations or other areas wherein these OFWs who are affected can also be redeployed if it is suitable to them and suitable to their area of work or their experience. If ano naman siya ... kung angkop naman doon sa kaalaman at kakayahan at skills ng ating mga kababayan na OFWs, puwede siyang mare-deploy. So nandoon pa rin iyong options na iyan na binibigay natin sa ating mga kababayan.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Sir, diyan lang sa re-deployment. How would they know, sir, let's say kung papaano sila mari-re-deploy? Sa iba kasi affected nga sila ng travel ban doon on a certain countries na mayroon tayo sa list? So papaano malalaman ng OFW that they will be, you know, mari-re-deploy nga sila on a certain areas?

SEC. NOGRALES: Kasi iyong DOLE pati iyong kaniyang mga kasamahan, mga attached agencies nila have been in touch naman with the OFWs who were affected. So ia-assess nila anong needs ng OFW na iyon 'di ba. So kung gusto niyang magtayo ng sariling negosyo, mayroon po tayong kit para diyan at may livelihood tayong ibibigay; ngayon, for re-deployment, siyempre bibigyan natin ng options 'no, depende nga.

So part of the assessment is to look at anong skill set niya; ano iyong dati niyang trabaho noon, tapos ano iyong available din at sa iyong mga destinations, mga bansa kung saan siya puwedeng ma-redeploy. So it depends 'no. It's not a one size fits all. Siyempre it depends on the assessment per OFW na affected.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Sir, one last lang po. Do you advise Filipinos to stay in the Philippines instead of travelling abroad while the spread of the virus is yet to be controlled?

SEC. NOGRALES: I think at this moment, we're trying to promote domestic tourism also in the country. So I think if we could advise also iyong mga kababayan natin na, yes, if you can help it, then iyong travel na lang domestically – meaning to say, within the Philippine shores – will help our domestic tourism, will help the tourism sector, will also help the Philippine economy. So kung maaari, dito lang muna sa bansa kasi marami pa namang mga destinations na puwedeng puntahan.

JINKY BATICADOS/IBC13: Okay, thank you sir.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Kay Secretary Duque. Sir, iyong test kits po na local na sinasabi, iyon po ba iyong from UP, iyong i-evaluate ng DOH?

SEC. DUQUE: Tama po kayo. At kanina nga po—palagay ko mangyari lang ibigay ko iyong mic kay Secretary Nograles kasi he seems to have the updates on this.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Okay, sige po sir. Sir, ask lang po namin, ask ko lang po if na-evaluate na po ba iyong test kits na iyon by DOH and... hindi pa po?

CABSEC. NOGRALES: So the process is, so it's DOST now who is in contact with this local group of scientists 'no. And many of them, if not all of them are from UP-Manila nga po. So the procedure is in coordination with the Department of Health – DOST and DOH will ask the WHO to expedite 'no the validation process. So, it's WHO, who will validate the kit and upon its validation, that is when we roll it out.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Na-submit na po ba sa WHO?

SEC. DUQUE: Wala pa sa ngayon. The important thing I'd like to emphasize here with regard to this rapid diagnostic test kits 'no would be it has to be vetted strictly for sensitivity and specificity. Kasi mahirap naman po iyong resulta ng test ay tagilid, iyong negative ginawang positive o iyong positive ginawang negative. So we will have to apply the most stringent standards of accuracy and sensitivity.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Okay, sir. So, sir when does the Philippines plan to send it to—to submit it to the WHO?

CABSEC. NOGRALES: So this was brought out to our attention yesterday by DOST, na they're already communicating with Department of Health. And then, it's DOST and DOH who will now be communicating with WHO para ma-expedite nga iyong validation. And then we're hoping na it will pass through the rigorous testing of the WHO para maka-rollout na kaagad tayong.

SEC. DUQUE: Let me just add that right now, very actively we are waiting for the WHO to send us experts for the capacity building of our laboratories. We have one, the RITM which is the sole reference laboratory for all of these testing for COVID-19. But I have instructed for them to already capacitate the sub-national reference laboratories in, one for SPMC in Mindanao, in Davao City in particular; the other one is in Vicente Sotto in Cebu.

The reason being we want a quicker/faster turnaround time rather than let patients wait it out longer in the hospitals where they have been classified as patients under investigation. Then, they can leave immediately as soon as they're found out to be negative. And however, the effort to improve and to buildup the capacity for quality testing does not end with the sub-national reference laboratories, but also we are enjoining the private sector hospitals with well-known and sophisticated laboratory capabilities. So we're going to help them through an accreditation by

RITMs. So we'll bring them into the fold so that we will have a much better capacity to do the COVID testing.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Okay, sir. Sir last na lang. Confirm ko lang sir. As of now do we have enough test kits for COVID-19 and ito pa rin po ba iyong from Japan?

SEC. DUQUE: The one, the stocks that came from Japan, we have 3,000 tests capacity. The WHO has given another 3,000, so we have now 6,000. And so far the testing, the total number of tests done would be about... say about 500. So we do have sufficient buffer of stock of test reagents and the chemical which is known as the RNA Primer.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Thank you, sir.

FRANCIS WAKEFIELD/DAILY TRIBUNE: Sec. Nograles, good morning po. Tatanungin lang namin, kasi kahapon sa press briefing ni Sec. Panelo, tatanungin niya raw si Presidente about iyong travel ban sa Taiwan. Nakapag-meeting na ho ba iyong interagency committee na nagdi-deal sa Coronavirus kung mali-lift na nga po iyong travel ban? Kasi may mga concerns, iyong mga OFWs natin na nakapagbayad na, bibiyahe na, iyong iba uuwi, hindi makauwi. So ano pong update doon sa travel ban, sir?

CABSEC. NOGRALES: I'll pass the mic to Secretary Duque because siya iyong sasagot doon sa ano...

SEC. DUQUE: Yes, thank you Sec. Nograles and to the one who threw in the question, Francis. At 3 o'clock this afternoon, we will be convening the interagency task force on COVID-19, and one of the major issues that will be deliberated upon will include the travel ban that has included lately the Taiwan. And we are aware of the sentiments of the Taiwan government vis-à-vis the travel ban and all of these will be considered in our deliberations, and hopefully come up with the consensus not just to address specifically the issue on the Taiwan having been included in the travel ban, but also a more broad consideration of factors that will help the task force formulate a set of criteria or parameters in so far as inclusion or exclusions is concerned. So that is what we will wait for whatever consensus the task force arrives at, we will share with the media as soon as possible.

FRANCIS WAKEFIELD/DAILY TRIBUNE: Okay, Sec. Pero sa ngayon ba masasagot ninyo sir kung ano po ba talaga ang naging pinaka-reason kung ba't naging travel ban, kasi parang may certain confusion kung bakit nga sinama ang Taiwan? Kasi kahapon sa press briefing, tinanong rin namin si Sec. Panelo na bakit po ang ibang countries like Singapore mas mataas po ang cases unlike sa Taiwan. So masasagot ho ba ninyo iyan para iyong mga OFWs naman na nako-confuse ba't nangyari ho iyong travel ban na iyon?

SEC. DUQUE: Siguro po ang kumpletong sagutan diyan mangyayari mamaya matapos ang task force. But preliminarily, the reason and the only reason I should like to believe, that has been considered in including Taiwan in the travel ban is really nothing else than public health and safety. That is the only consideration.

Q: I have a question to Secretary Nograles. You know, Chinese government now is making great efforts to fight against the epidemic. So do you have a confidence with the Chinese economy and you know China and the Philippines have many projects in cooperation. What's the Philippine government will do to guarantee that the projects or at large, the Philippine economy will not—is not to be influenced?

CABSEC. NOGRALES: Well, we obviously recognize China as one of our leading trade partners of the Philippines. And we hope that China will be able to get back to its usual business even given the challenges that your country is facing right now, we are confident that you will be able to overcome these challenges. And I think the sooner that China overcomes these challenges, the better for the rest of the world, because China is the leading trade partner for different countries as well, not just the Philippines.

But speaking for the Philippines, I think it's important that we all support China getting back on its feet. And it's also important that we continue our good relations in terms of economic trade and beneficial relations for the both us, for both of our countries. So we hope for the best, and we're confident that China will be able to bounce back from the challenges that are facing your country.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Secretary Duque. Sir, the WHO yesterday said that in Hubei Province, medical professionals can now classify suspected cases via chest imaging, making monitoring and reporting cases much faster. So, do we have talks with WHO if the same mechanism can be adopted here for faster classification, sir?

SEC. DUQUE: That's very difficult to answer. For one, we still don't have any local transmissions, okay. But looking forward, and hopefully it doesn't happen, but you know, it's best to really always level up in case the worse scenario does happen.

So, what is paramount in so far as providing clinical best practice management of individual COVID-19 cases is concerned. We will look into that development from the China medical care system that raised this issue. It's very interesting, but I do not have the details of such. But the concept seems to be very, very good.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: For Secretary Duque. Sir, the DOH has issued an advisory on concerts, public events and other mass gatherings. To set the record straight, is this advisory recommendatory in nature? And iyon nga po, nabanggit ninyo kanina, Valentine's Day today, paano kaya, sir, iyong mga may plano na at matagal nang nakapag-organize ng mga concerts and other public events?

SEC. DUQUE: The advisory is purely recommendatory. But we have not been short of giving other supplemental, if not complementary, advisories. Like if you're in a hotel, there's a gathering there - a convention perhaps - the hotel, make sure that there is enough supply of disinfectants in almost every corner; if possible, you know, people can just press the dispenser to use that. On top of the fact, that you are also encouraged in support of personal hygiene to wash your hands properly. Wash your hands as frequently as possible, and there is no danger of doing that – everything to gain.

And of course, all the other advisories from the DOH, you have to take this not independently of one another; that in the whole gamut of advisories that has been given by the DOH will have to be followed to support our efforts, our overall efforts and strategy to prevent the spread, not just of the COVID-19. Hindi lang po usapin COVID-19 ito, kung hindi marami din po tayong mga mikroboyo; we have viruses and bacteria, they abound in the environment. So you have the streptococcus pneumoniae that is a common cause of community acquired pneumonia. Then you have the Klebsiella pneumoniae, Haemophilus influenza. And that's just talking about the bacteria. Let's shift very quickly naman to the viruses. We have the influenza A virus. You remember the pandemic AH1N1 of 2009? So iyan! Now, that's already part of the circulating viruses. And then, you also have the influenza virus B.

So it will help us if at the top of our minds is the consciousness really to be very mindful of personal hygiene.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Opo. Sir, just a quick follow up given that statement po, paano iyon, what's the best way po kaya to celebrate Valentine's Day? Do you advise na stay at home na lang po?

SEC. DUQUE: The best greeting is like this or do you want the Namaste. You just ... or flying kiss. When you do the flying kiss, make sure it doesn't touch your lips. And you also don't talk while you are delivering the kiss, okay – airborne delivery of the kiss. Not to say that COVID is airborne; it is not airborne. It is via respiratory droplet still, is the mode of transmission.

IAN CRUZ/GMA7: For Secretary Duque. Secretary, may update na po ba tayo regarding doon sa plan ng interagency task force regarding doon sa mga Filipino crew of Diamond Princess? What will happen to them after the quarantine period? Will they be allowed to go home directly to the Philippine, sir?

SEC. DUQUE: That will be a subject of deliberations later in our task force together with DOLE. We want the private sector—I still don't have sufficient information to make any recommendation later on. But as soon as this presscon concludes, I will go back to really find out whether the crew of about 570 plus Filipinos who are reportedly coming back to the Philippines, I would like to know the private sector role in this. Because if there is an agency, for example, or if there is an entity that should take of them, I would like to propose that the responsibility 'should quarantine be required' be shared with that private entity.

IAN CRUZ/GMA7: Pero, sir, would you recommend quarantine, another week of quarantine or two weeks of quarantine here in the Philippines?

SEC. DUQUE: Well, this is something that we have yet to discuss. We're getting in touch with the WHO and our own local experts on the matter. In fact, I spoke with former Secretary of Health Manolito Dayrit who is an epidemiologist and he has committed to make time for us to discuss this, so that we can plan this very well and making sure that there is no stone left unturned as we plan and execute whatever is the best option that we arrived at eventually.

IAN CRUZ/GMA7: Opo. For both of you sir: Mayroon pong statement si Senator Lacson. Ang sabi po niya, “Just like the termination of VFA, the Philippine government’s travel ban to Taiwan is a policy decision implemented by the Executive Department which may not necessarily be correct, health wise and politically,” – ano pong reaksiyon ninyo?

SEC. NOGRALES: Well I think, health wise, I think every Filipino citizen naman siguro would agree that we have to take care of the general welfare and health of the people. And doing this travel ban is one step and one way where we are able to address those concerns. I think it’s a better way for us to manage the situation right now.

And so far, because of the travel ban, I think the results will speak for itself: We’ve been able to contain the problem; we’ve been able to manage it better. And I think we stand with that decision.

SEC. DUQUE: Thank you, Sec. Karlo. With regard to the statement, that is the reason why we have been holding our interagency task force meetings, because we need to make recommendations based on the evidence-based risk assessment that we do periodically. So ngayon, we look at, we have a graphical representation of the trend in terms of rates of increases of new cases in the countries where the COVID-19 has spread.

So we’re nimble, there’s no such a thing as cast in stone. We are flexible, but the primacy of public health and safety is always our consideration.

IAN CRUZ/GMA7: Secretary, totoo po ba iyong mga reports na against daw po ang Chinese Ambassador sa lifting ng travel ban sa Taiwan?

SEC. DUQUE: I’m not aware. There has been no report of such to my office.

IAN CRUZ/GMA7: Kay Secretary Nograles, sorry po may phone-in question. Ano raw po ang effects sa remittances ng COVID19?

CABSEC. NOGRALES: So iyong aming ginawang cluster, pinag-aaralan namin ang lahat ng mga effects, sa economy. At doon sa remittance, we’ll get the figures next week, so may tasking po kaming ginawa para malaman kung ano ba iyong magiging projected figures. Although may nabasa ako na may isang grupo, think-tank, na gumawa na ng preliminary estimates ‘no, pero siguro mas magandang ma-validate din natin iyon sa numero din ng hawak ng ating government agencies.

Next week po, mayroon po kaming mabibigay na mas accurate na numero doon sa effect ng COVID-19 sa remittances. But these are just estimates ‘no, I just like to make that clear na hanggang estimates lang tayo just so that we are better prepared ‘no to handle whatever negative effects tapos i-mitigate natin or put in mitigating measures para hindi naman ganoon ka-lala ang maging epekto nito sa ating ekonomiya at para sa ating mga kababayan.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Good morning Secretaries, Melo Acuña from Asia Pacific Daily. For Secretary Duque. Would you know if the Chinese Embassy and other

embassies have implemented measure to protect their nationals in the country? Would you be aware if they have already organized clinics to attend to their needs, to their citizen's need? And number two, would the Philippines and China be cooperating in terms of research and data sharing because we very well know that WHO and DOH are in close coordination and collaboration? So, would you tell us about the level of cooperation between China and the Philippines? Thank you.

SEC. DUQUE: Well to answer the first part of your question, whether the embassies and in particular, Chinese Embassy has already extended services for its people here in the country like clinics perhaps? There's none, because we are not discriminating anyone from the care that everyone so deserves especially in these most trying times. So that if you look at our list of patients under investigation, this is an assortment of you know, foreigners, Chinese, Filipinos, etcetera. So we do not discriminate in much the same way that they too, do not discriminate as you can see in Japan, in this international conveyance... the MV Princess that is stuck off Yokohama Bay, they give care to everyone. So I think that should be maintained.

And then the next part of your question is the level of cooperation between the Philippines and China for example, does that match the level of cooperation that now exists between China and the WHO? Well I think the fact that China has relatively been more opened about the COVID-19 and this has been recognized by the WHO, I think the potential for a stronger collaboration, cooperation is there in terms of galvanizing countries, first world countries to do research, say to address treatment of... to address vaccines. These are all already being contemplated, but again we have to look at the details if any of such evolving cooperation and collaboration in the area of research.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Thank you. For Secretary Nograles. Secretary, would you care to comment on a report about 3 Filipinos going to the ICJ complaining about the alleged arbitrary prevention or suspension of flights between China, Macau and Hong Kong as it may affect their livelihood? Thank you very much.

CABSEC. NOGRALES: No, I'm not aware.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Okay, thank you very much.

CABSEC. NOGRALES: Paanong...

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Three workers filed a case with the ICJ.

CABSEC. NOGRALES: No, I'm not aware. That's news to me.

MELO ACUÑA/ASIA PACIFIC DAILY: Okay, thank you.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Secretary Duque, good morning po. Secretary, the World Health Organization has said that there are tentative signs that COVID-19 is stabilizing. What does this mean Secretary, malapit na bang matapos iyong krisis sa nCoV?

SEC. DUQUE: Well, I don't want to be a 'KJ', but it's premature. We have seen some initial trending that it's not consistent, so we have to wait for more data to come in and to establish a trending that's more consistent whether it's plateauing, or is it going down, etcetera. So, still the situation remains fluid. Thank you.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Secretary, follow up lang. Dito sa nararamdaman nating lamig lalo na pagka umaga, pagdating nga gabi. Pagka dumating ba iyong summer season, makakatulong ito para at least hindi lumaki iyong cases ng ano—o iyong spread ng nCoV?

SEC. DUQUE: You know apart from anecdotal reports, there is really no hard science to support that it may actually—well let me take that back. They're saying that it will be difficult to inactivate the virus, the COVID-19 under low temperature and low humidity. So in the Philippines, there is relatively high humidity and high temperature. How is the COVID-19 going to behave under such environmental conditions?

Nobody really knows for sure, because as they say, o iyong mga spread relatively in cold countries, okay – Japan, Australia, Canada etcetera... But iyong Singapore down south, that's warm, temperature is relatively similar to ours. But now they have—the number two with the highest number of cases, but still double digit number or burden of cases. So the virus really presents—the challenge here is that the blind spots continue to characterize this virus. And the efforts to familiarize ourselves with this virus is ongoing and so science has never been more active than it is today precisely to continue to characterize the very granular aspects of this virus.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILIPPINES: Secretary Duque, you just mentioned iyong a lack of more consistent trend that could say determine if nag-stabilize na po iyong situation. Is there a specific observation period, I don't know, two weeks, a month that you would be monitoring to—kumbaga say eventually that we can relax a little bit or what? And what factors would you be looking at during that period, if there is one?

SEC. DUQUE: Clearly, the factors to be considered would be the data stream that comes in. So like what is now the rate of increase of new cases in Hubei Province and then for the entire China, okay. And the same should apply to the other countries where the COVID-19 has spread to about 24/25 countries. So this is what will help us determine whether there has been a better of you know, the results are getting better, the situation/the conditions are getting better, so iyon lang. There's really not much.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: So it's not really about monitoring iyong case natin dito because now we're saying, wala na right now na confirmed cases and there's no local transmission. Those factors are not enough for us to say if okay na tayo? Kumbaga, we're dependent on data pa rin from the other countries?

SEC. DUQUE: Yeah, definitely. I mean, there's no way that just because we don't have local transmission ... many countries, 11, have already reported local transmissions. And so who are we to say that we won't have local transmission.

So the important thing is we cannot afford to let our guards down. We need to be very, very ready in the event that this local transmission does happen.

INA ANDOLONG/CNN PHILS: Last na kay Secretary Nograles naman. You mentioned that effects to the economy may just—I mean, posible lang magkaroon ng effects sa economy in the first quarter. Is that an expression maybe of optimism that, I don't know, the travel ban may not go beyond March?

SEC. NOGRALES: Well, yes, it's an expression of optimism. We hope that we're able to control the situation ever more. We hope that by the first quarter, things would start to taper off.

Again, it's a sense of optimism – we're hopeful. The primary action right now of government is to control the spread of the disease, to be able to hopefully catch it or contain it and do all of the medical protocols so that we'll be able to, you know hopefully, by the end of the first quarter, see the tapering off of the negative effects of COVID.

But, be that as it may, the task force under Secretary Duque will continue to do their regular briefings and coordination meetings. Our cluster will continue to monitor the economic effects of COVID-19. So Secretary Duque will take care of the health aspect; kami naman-, our cluster will take care of the economic aspect. That way, we're all prepared 'no to manage the situation because there are a lot of variable kasi. Maraming hindi natin makontrol, but there are ... marami ring aspeto na kaya nating kontrolin.

So kung ano ang kaya nating kontrolin from a management perspective, gagawin natin and make sure na walang ... no stones unturned. Gagawin natin, we cover all bases para pagdating ng mga hindi natin inaasahan na mga bagay, then we're more prepared to react. So both, from a medical and health standpoint, and as far as economic stand point is concerned, ganoon din.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: Secretary Duque. From our reporter in Cagayan, mayroon daw couple from Beijing who refused to be hospitalized. Fourteenth day na yata nila kahapon, wala naman daw silang nararamdaman. Nag-stay lang sila sa bahay. Ano raw ba dapat ang policy kapag ganoon, kapag ayaw ng couple o ng tao, puwede nang hindi i-subject ng check up?

SEC. DUQUE: Galing po ba ito sa...

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: Beijing.

SEC. DUQUE: Sa Beijing. I would like to invite in Dr. Thea of the Epidemiology Bureau to comment.

DR. THEA: So magandang umaga po. It is a part of our protocol that all patients under investigation should really be isolated. But, yes, we are encountering some challenges in convincing them. I think, we are addressing that already by doing our best to fully explain what is the effect if they don't allow themselves to be isolated and what is the public health impact of not them being isolated. For some, we have patients under investigation who we identified already beyond the 14-day quarantine period.

Halimbawa, dumating po sila, they arrived here January 31, so exactly today is their 14th day. So if you find them after the 14-day, what do we do? So we make sure are they symptomatic as of now. And then, just to be very sure, we also collect specimens and we send these to RITM so that these will be tested. Now, until those tests come back negative, we make sure 'no, we advise them that they should still be under home quarantine so that if ever these tests come back positive, will limit their transmission.

So I think the regional office under our Director Rio Magpantay has done his best to collect these specimens already, and will have an update on that, sir.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: That's regarding the case in Isabela, ma'am?

DR. THEA: Yes po. Ongoing na po iyong pakikipag-usap po. I think, Region II has one of the highest numbers of patients under investigations mostly because they have international flights.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: This particular couple already submitted their specimen?

DR. THEA: We will follow up po. But we have already instructed our regional epidemiology and surveillance unit to follow them up – and even if they're already beyond the quarantine period – to still collect those specimens and to advise this couple that they should remain on home quarantine until those specimens come back negative.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: What happens po if these suspected PUIs remain ano ... para bang they won't cooperate with DOH?

DR. THEA: Those are things that we are actually discussing yesterday. So what is the authority of the Department of Health to really oblige them? These are things that are actually concluded in one of our new law.

Sir, if I may? We have new Republic Act, it's the mandatory reporting of notifiable diseases. It's RA 11332. And under one section states that if you do not cooperate, for example, these are patients under investigation, they should really be isolated; they should be isolated in a health facility. Under that Republic Act, the Department of Health and its partner agencies have the authority to actually oblige them to be isolated because it's a public health concern and we should do our best to limit possible transmission from these PUIs.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: They can be bodily carried out of their homes and brought to hospital?

DR. THEA: Yes, ma'am. But of course, we do our best not to do that. I think, like I mentioned earlier, it's a simple matter of explaining to them why the need. I think for a lot of our patients under investigation, it's the fear and anxiety, "Why are they being isolated? What's going with them?" But after explaining to them 'what's the purpose of isolation and testing, most of them,' almost all of them will agree that ... in fact, at times, they're the ones already insisting that, 'When are you going to transport me to the hospital?'

So proper communication, effective communication will really help in management of these PUIs.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: Thank you po. Another question po. Sir, based on recent briefing ng DOH, there are like around 100 Chinese, 18 Americans and other nationalities who are considered PUIs. Mayroon po bang bagong statistics?

And number two, how's the budget of the DOH in addressing these issues? Are we using regular budget, and then habang wala pa iyong supplemental budget? Mayroon bang infusion?

SEC. DUQUE: Well, for the nationalities admitted as patients under investigation, we have 280 Filipinos accounting for 62%; Chinese - 99, 22%; others - 76, which accounts for 17%.

So iyong budget – we're okay, so far, so good. We're using the quick response fund and also the medical assistance to indigent patients' fund. So as of today, it's been manageable. The funding requirement hasn't posed any serious problem.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL STAR: Sir, do you have the number- iyong affected individuals, not by percentage?

SEC. DUQUE: We have two hundred eighty (280) Filipinos, ninety nine (99) Chinese and seventy six (76) others.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, what are the preparations of the DOH in the event of local transmission and ano pong mga scenario po kaya ang i-expect ng public, like, would you recommend a closure of schools?

SEC. DUQUE: Well, there is already a protocol or a set of guidelines that has been issued out to the Local Government Units. In fact, the event last Monday which the President graced, I was asked to present, what are the steps that need to be carried out by the Local Chief Executives and under their authority, of course, the municipal health officer, the city health officers, the provincial health officers, will be in coordination and to the grassroots level, the reactivation of the Barangay emergency health response teams or the BERTS kung tawagin.

So iyan po ang mga responders, assuming there's going to be a local transmission, very much liked what happened in 2003. We recall the SARS event of 2003 at doon po sila sa- mayroon po tayong framework kasi - The Four Door Framework. Kung nag fail sa surveillance o iyong border surveillance nag fail o iyong community surveillance nagkaroon ng transmission doon, then we have measures in place and protocols to support the execution of those measures.

For example, at the prevention side we bombard the Local Government Units of the latest advisories, latest reminders on personal hygiene, social distancing, cough etiquette etc., and also leveling up the capacity to mitigate the impact of, say patients, now actually—who might actually already have the COVID acute respiratory disease, which means the hospitals, provincial hospitals, referral systems is in place, the clinical best practice management of

individual COVID-19 patients with ARD; what are the measures being done to ensure they don't slide into deadly complications.

So local quarantine is also one of those that is being considered just like what happened during the SARS event of 2003. Alcala, Pangasinan na quarantine iyong buong area na iyan just to ensure that the containment measures are strong and effective, and of course the impact on the communities is a bit disruptive but that's okay. I mean, they soon realized that this is really needed to prevent the spread of the virus.

Q: Sec. Duque, what is the basis for the WHO and DOH recommendation on whether or not we have to wear facemasks because it seems to me that there is no standard recommendations some countries are encouraging it, while others discouraged it?

SEC. DUQUE: Well, I think in so far as we are concerned I cannot speak for the other countries. Our coordination with the WHO, with regard to the use of mask, is only embedded in the guidelines that we issued out, that we do not encourage the use of mask among people who are not manifesting any symptoms of flu, coughs, colds, and if there's fever you would want that particular person to just stay put in his place. But for them to continue to the wear, so as not to spread-to contaminate others, to infect others in the same household.

Now the paramount objective is to ensure that in the face of global shortage of mask, N-88 mask – surgical mask. We have to be very judicious in the use of such and limiting it to our health care workers, the front liners in the provision of care to patients. So they are at the top of the totem pole of prioritizations. So that's very important.

In the school, let me just give you a scenario. In a classroom of elementary students, of forty (40) students, you need a mask? The question is. Yes you need a mask that's readily available, in case the students suddenly develop symptoms of respiratory illness.

So you need to isolate, you need to take the child out, give the child a mask, bring the child to the infirmary for further evaluations. And if the indications are there for the child to be sent home, then the child is sent home. But to see, all of the students wearing mask – No. That's not certainly- that's far from any of our recommendations with regard to the use of masks.

SAM: Kay Secretary Duque po. For now mayroon po bang other countries bukod po doon sa four initially countries na na-isuhan ng travel ban na kino-consider ng Department of Health na also mabigyang ng travel ban because of the COVID-19?

SEC. DUQUE: None as of the moment. So let's keep it at that.

SAM: Kay Sec. Nograles po. Earlier noong mga past few weeks ago nabanggit po nila na isa sa mga iko-consider na factor sa possible lifting of travel ban sa China, iyong parang may commitment iyong China na ise-secure iyong safety ng mga Filipinos doon sa area nila. Mayroon na po bang nabigay na ganoong commitment?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes, napag-usapan iyong isa iyon sa mga tinitingnan nating factors bago natin i-lift. As to, iyong commitment, we have to check with DFA kung may communication to that effect. But noong pinag-usapan kasi namin ito with the President, nabanggit nga iyon na isa. Although it's not the only condition, it's one of those factors that will help us determine.

Pero ang importante lamang dito is we continue to assess the situation at gaya ng sinabi ko, it will be on a daily basis. Kaya nga po laging nagmi-meeting po iyong task force ni Sec. Duque pati sa amin sa economic side tinitingnan din namin at regular din po ang aming meetings para ma-evaluate natin kung kinakailangan pa bang i-lift, kung kailan ili-lift, kung kailangan i-lift.

Lahat ng mga ng iyan ay pag-uusapan, but iyong sinabi lamang na guarantee isa lamang iyan sa mga maaaring maging factors to take in to consideration but it's not the and all and be all.

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Sir, may masasama po pa bang ibang bansa para dito sa travel ban?

SEC. DUQUE: Sa ngayon, wala pa po.

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Because according to DFA Secretary Teddy Locsin, that he will not support any ASEAN, Singapore travel ban.

SEC. DUQUE: I think I've answered it that there is none at the moment.

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Sir, on another issue can you give me latest the update on the Bicol that was monitored having this COVID-19 – twelve persons?

SEC. DUQUE: I'm not aware. That's, I guess one of the fake news that the goes around, so we'll get you in-touch via phone of Doctor Thea De Guzman..

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Okay, thank you sir.

HENRY URI/DZRH: Secretary this probably your parting statement. Paano ninyo kakausapin ang taong bayan na hindi pa rin maalís ang takot at pangamba na baka sila ay tamaan, mahawaan at maging sanhi ito ng kanilang kamatayan, itong pinag-uusapan nating covid-19?

SEC. DUQUE: Ang DOH ay hindi na po natutulog sa pagmamatyag, pagbabantay at ako po ay nagpapasalamat sa lahat ng aking mga kasama sa DOH, ang mga lingkod bayan na talaga pong nakatutok dito hindi na po sila nagpapahinga halos – ang kanilang weekend ay naging weekdays na rin.

At tayo po ay, so far wala po tayong local transmission, is somehow a reflection of the great efforts that have been poured into by our professional, dedicated civil servants who have been burning the midnight oils, so to speak, to really get all the best information there is available and to recommend to the Secretary or to the Executive Committee of the DOH measures that will

continue to improve, where we are right now in responding to the evolving and threat of the covid-19.

So we reassure our people that the DOH is on top of the situation and so is the Tasks Force and we have had four meetings. And today will be, I think, the fifth meeting and this is to ensure that we are not lagging behind in terms of mounting an effective response to the COVID-19, and in collaboration with the WHO which bridges us – the Philippine Department of Health to the Chinese Ministry of Health as well as their center for disease control.

We are also very much in touch, again through the WHO, the latest developments to include does practices that have arisen in response to COVID-19 by the various countries where this COVID-19 has spread,

So we are in constant coordination in the cabinet. The President himself first and foremost has a readily approved a budget of 2,025,000,000 for the procurement of adequate supply of a personal protective equipment. Bearing in mind of course, that our health care workers do get this supplies ahead of everyone because they are the front line service providers and the President has make sure that he is made aware of this on a daily basis and he has articulated his concern for the welfare of the Filipino people and emphasizing that the privacy of public health in the safety cannot be subjugated to any other considerations. Thank you.

HENRY URI/DZRH: Same question Secretary Nograles. Ano ang katiyakan ang lahat ng sanay ng gobyerno and lahat ng Cabinet members and secretaries, government agencies ay gumagalaw para sa kapakanan ng taong bayan para hindi na lumala ito at may mga tulong na nakahanda ang pamahalaan.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes, kagaya ng sinabi ko meron tayong ina-apply na whole-of-government approach dito.

So doon sa health aspects nandiyan po si Secretary Duque at kanyang Tasks force; doon sa Economic aspects nandoon din po ‘yung cluster namin at tinitingnan ‘yung magiging negative effect nito sa ekonomiya o maaring maging negative effect nito sa ekonomiya, tapos paano natin ma-mitigate ma neutralize and to ensure na hindi naman masisira ‘yung targets natin doon sa economic growth targets natin – so lahat ng sangay, lahat ng ahensiya, lahat ng departamento at kagawaran ng gobyerno ay nagsasama-sama, nagtutulung-tulong, nagko-coordinate para dito.

Pero siguro ang pinaka-malaking factor na hiningi lang po namin ay ang cooperation ng taongbayan. Kasi, kahit ano man ang gagawin ng gobyerno: Mga hakbang, ano ‘mang gagawin nating mga measure, ano mang gagawin nating mga protocols kung walang cooperation ang taong bayan at walang support ang taongbayan ay hindi maging ganoon ka-successful ang ginagawa natin.

At pangalawa, ‘yung sa fake news nga po, napaka-importante, kaya nga ginagawa namin ito nag p-press briefing. Ang DOH lagi po ring nag pi-press briefing, lahat ng mga announcements directives lahat ng mga advisories ng Department of Health nandoon po sa social media, nasa tri-

media, sa lahat ng mga media outlets na maaring ibigay ay binibigay nila, para alam ng taong bayan kung ano ba talaga ‘yung totoong situation, anong totoo at tunay na mga advisories.

So maaari po, itong mga official advisories lamang ng gobyerno mula sa Department of Health ito lang po ‘yung basahin natin at i-spread natin. Huwag po natin spread ‘yung mga fake news, huwag po natin i-spread ‘yung mga hindi naman verified na mga report dahil hindi nakakatulong ito.

So ito po ‘yung kinakailangan natin sa panahong ito na magkaisa, magtulungan po tayo at wala nang bashing, wala nang politicizing, at walang ng spreading of fake news.

HENRY URI/DZRH: Alright, salamat po.

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Source: PCOO-NIB (News and Information Bureau-Data Processing Center)