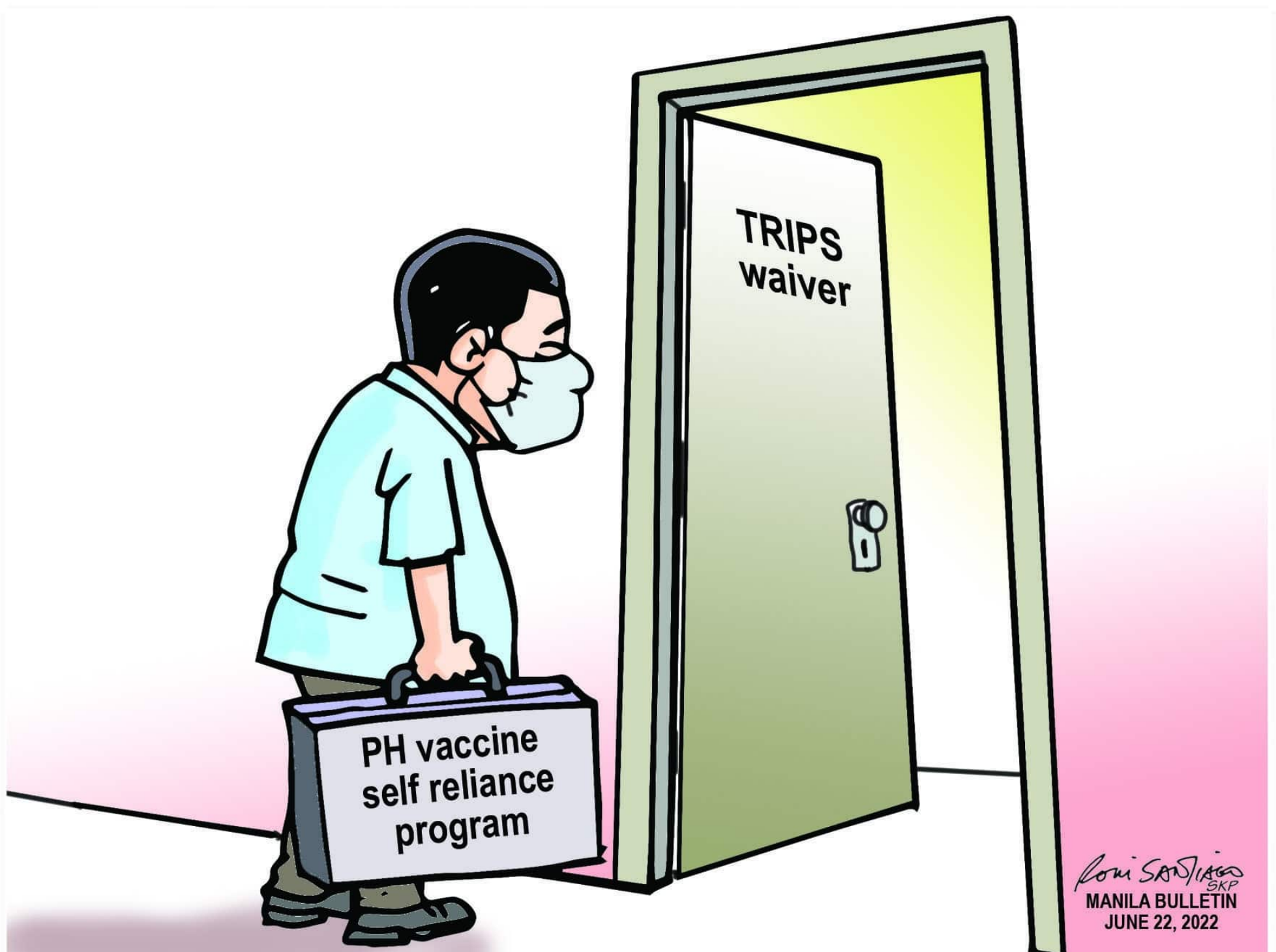


Opinion, Opinion-Editorial

# WTO deal on waiver of Covid-19 vaccine patent to spur local manufacturing

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The most meaningful agreement forged at the recently concluded 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva is the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on the manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines by non-producing countries, which are mostly economically developing nations.

The TRIPS waiver is simply the lifting of patents by manufacturers of Covid-19 vaccines, which are produced only by developed economies – EU, US, and China.

For humanitarian reason, the patent right holders relented and agreed to waive their rights for five years over the manufacture of these vaccines by developing countries for their own use only and not for exports.

Our government joined the call with other developing countries in seeking the patent waiver for Covid-19 vaccines. Even President Duterte has expressed his desire to make vaccine manufacturing his legacy.

**Now that we got what we wanted, the ball is in our hands.**

**Trade and Industry Undersecretary Ceferino S. Rodolfo, who led the Philippine delegation to the MC12 in Geneva, said two vaccine manufacturing project proposals are in the offing. He said the agreement will further intensify the Philippines Vaccine Self Reliance Program.**

**But to realize the full contribution of the TRIPS Waiver to the Vaccine Self-Reliance Program, Rodolfo has called for the passage of the Pandemic Protection Bill filed by Sen. Imee Marcos along with Senators Francis Pangilinan, Ralph Recto, Ramon Bong Revilla Jr., Pia Hontiveros and Sonny Angara.**

**The Board of Investments (BOI) has expressed full support to this bill as it covers provisions for stockpiling, preference for locally manufactured, and compliance with international standards.**

**For the next Congress, the BOI will also discuss the possibility of including a provision on advance purchase commitment, subject to competitive pricing, as this has been raised by vaccine originators.**

**The reality though is that vaccine manufacturing is not just about patents, as it requires the readiness of the pharmaceutical sector.**

**In fact, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL) has already established the mechanisms with the Department of Health for compulsory licensing. There has been no taker yet.**

**Thus, the need for stronger collaboration to help develop the pharmaceutical sector. This calls for strong drive among the Department of Health, Food and Drugs Administration, BOI/DTI, among others.**

**In the meantime, there is one window where the Philippines is seen to benefit from this WTO agreement.**

**While vaccines manufacturing may take longer, the Philippines can benefit more from the TRIPS waiver when WTO members will finally agree to include therapeutics and equipment.**

**The MC12 deal on TRIPS waiver also agreed for a mandated review in six months for possible inclusion of therapeutics and equipment.**

**This is where local manufacturing of Covid-19 therapeutics and medical equipment such as diagnostics equipment and test kits would be easier for the Philippines.**

**The TRIPS waiver is a pivotal agreement to ensure access for health for all. The Philippines should take advantage of this deal and work on it for our advantage.**

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